

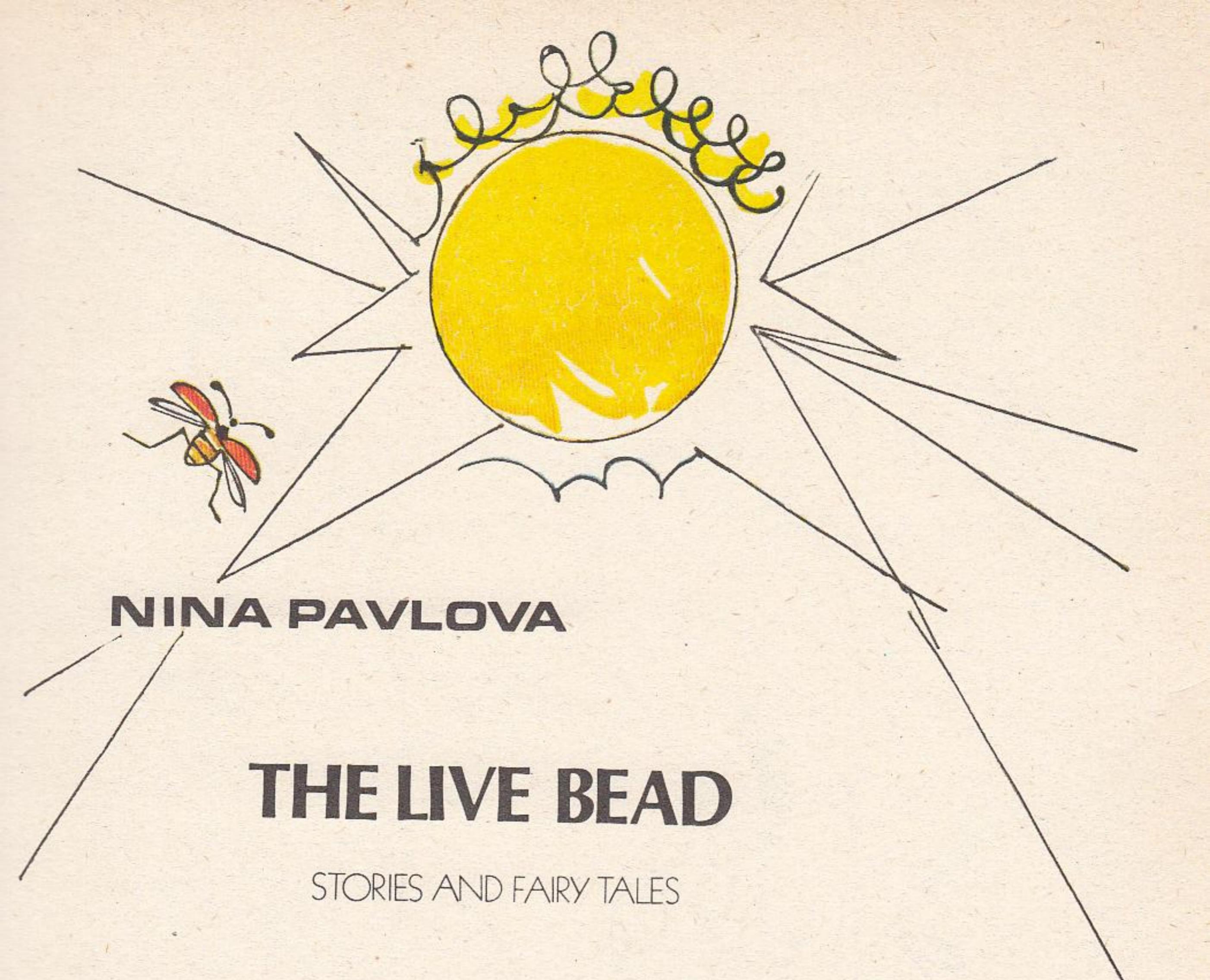
NINA PAVLOVA

THE LIVE BEAD









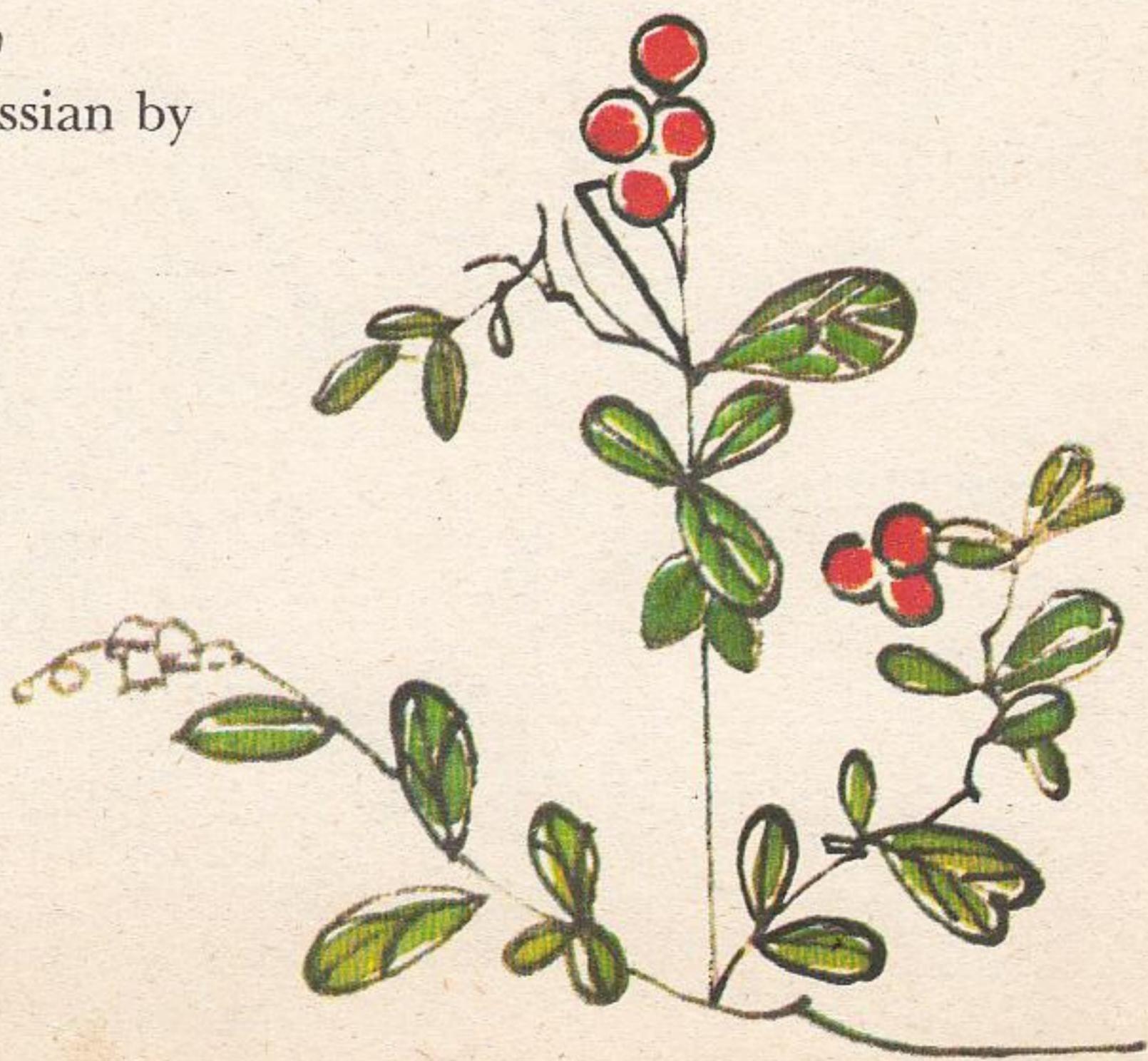
NINA PAVLOVA

THE LIVE BEAD

STORIES AND FAIRY TALES

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НЕ ВИДЕЛИ—УВИДИМ

На английском языке

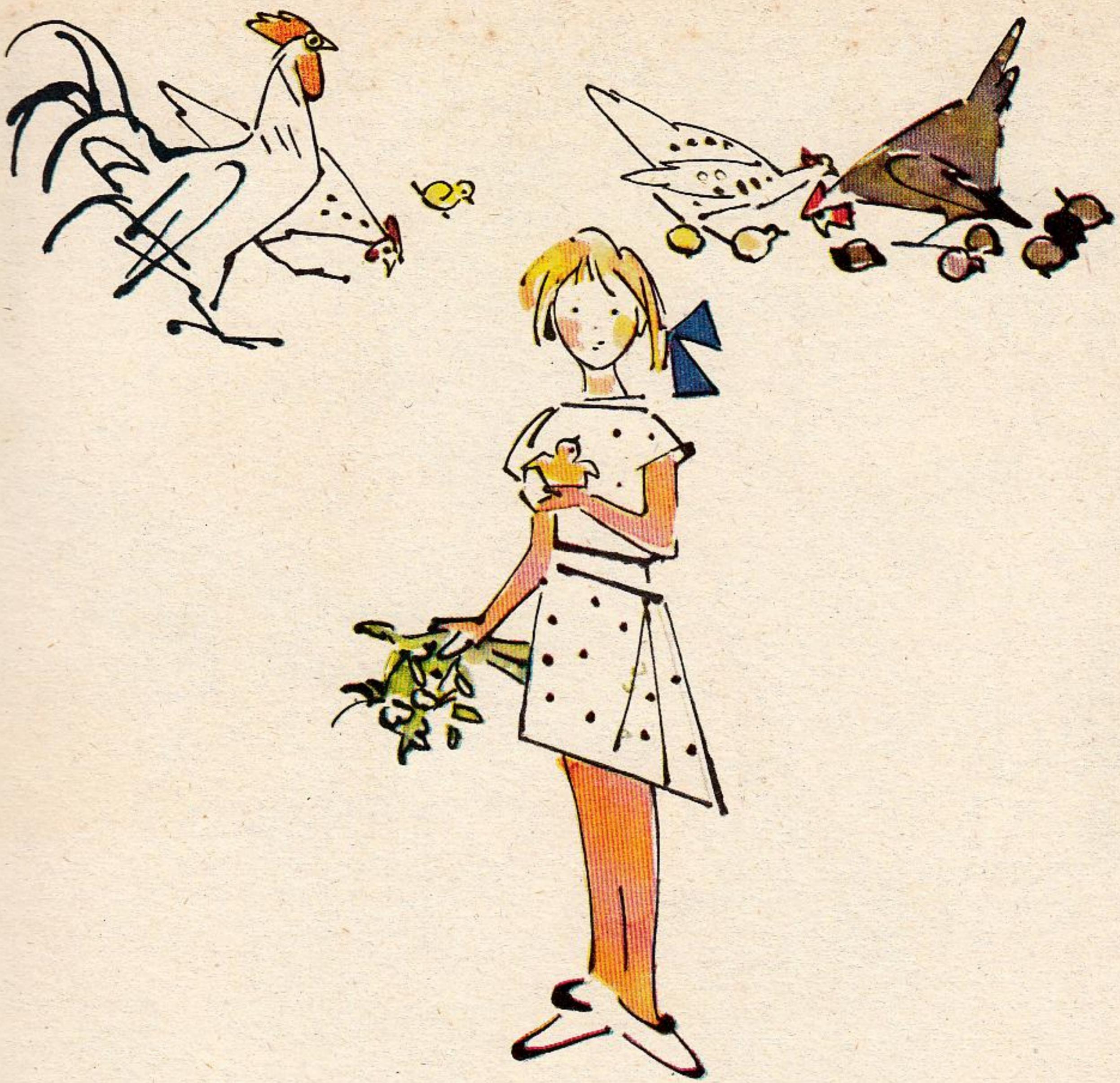


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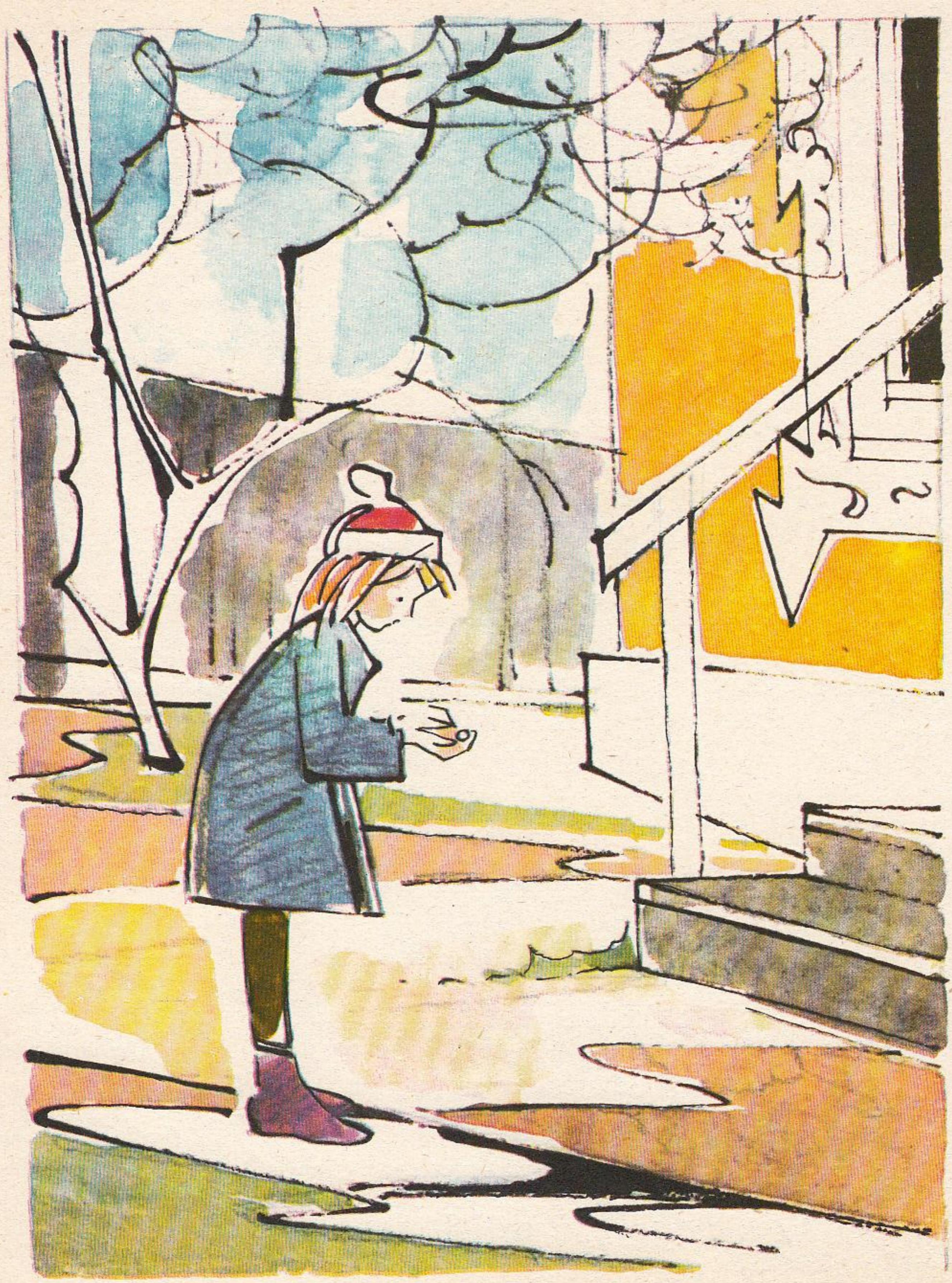
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STORIES





THE LIVE BEAD

Seven little beads lived in Galya's matchbox. And what a grand life they led: every day they were taken for a walk. Even now Galya was tipping up the box, letting all the little beads roll out onto the table: two red, two blue and one yellow. They would go walking in pairs: the red in front, followed by the blue and then the yellow.

Galya had found the last bead on the porch. She had been digging a stick into a crack one day, prising out bits of rind, grit and stones—nothing interesting, when suddenly she hit upon the little bead. Nice and round, smooth and weighty, obvious at once it was precious. Only with no hole. Instead of the hole it had little spots and patterns alongside just like a goat's horns. It did not really matter about the hole. Galya liked the new bead better than anything else.

One time Galya took her little beads to the seaside. The sea was in a blue dish. It had three ships upon it—nutshells. Galya put her beads in the ships and off they sailed. The pair of red beads went in the first boat, the blue pair in the second, and the yellow one in the third. All at once a storm blew up, turning the ships upside down and sinking the beads. Just as Galya was about to rescue them her mother called her; and off she went for a walk.

The moment she got back she began to retrieve her little beads from the sea. She brought up the red ones from the seabed—they were all-right, alive and well; she fetched up the blue ones—also safe and sound. But when she pulled out the yellow bead, she looked at it and even took fright: what on earth had happened to it? It was all wrinkle, just like Mother's fingers after the washing.

Galya put the sickly bead on her palm and took it to Mother. Perhaps Mother would set it right.

But Mother said,

'Never mind. Let it lie in water till morning. It will right itself.'

Next morning Galya fetched the yellow bead out of the water and looked at it: it was fine now. It was certainly better: it had grown, puffed out and put on weight, yet no longer the hard little bead of before; in fact, it did not resemble a bead at all. And on the spot where it had had the goat's horn pattern there was something like a little trunk concealed beneath the skin.



Galya rushed to show her Mother.

'Just look, Mother,' she exclaimed. 'See what the bead is now. How important it looks. But I don't want to play with it any more. Why is it so soft? The red and blue beads are better.'

'I like it though,' said Mother. 'Leave it with me.'

Mother poured some water into a saucer, placed a rag on the bottom and the yellow bead upon the wet rag.

And there it was lying when Mother called Galya to see what had happened next to her bead.

Galya took one look and cried,

'It has cut a tooth like my baby brother. See how sharp and white it is.'

True enough, the bead's little trunk had pierced the skin and climbed upwards like a tiny tooth.

'Why has the bead got a tooth?' asked Galya. 'Has it come to life?'

'But it was alive all the time,' said Mother.

'Even when it was living in the matchbox?' asked Galya.

'Even then,' said Mother. 'You think it is a little bead, but it's really a tiny living pea.'

'No, I don't want it like that—a live pea,' Galya said. 'Better a live bead.'

The live bead's tooth grew into a long root. And at the top rose a little looped stem. It was clear that the live bead longed for some soil.

Mother and Galya went to plant it. It was still cold as they went out into the yard; only recently the snow had melted and fresh grass was growing only by the wall. So there, alongside the house wall, Galya dug a hole while Mother dropped in the live bead and covered it up with earth. Then they stuck in a stick.

'Is the stick for the live bead?' asked Galya.

'It certainly is,' said Mother.

That made Galya laugh.

'When the live bead misses me,' she said, 'it can peep out of the ground and climb up the stick to see where I am. Right, Mother?'

That day Galya popped out a few times to see the stick. But the live bead was not peeping through the ground.

It grew warm. Flowers bloomed and butterflies fluttered by. Mother was busy in the kitchen garden. Galya too had a lot to do and forgot all about the live bead.

But one day she was running by the stick when she suddenly saw a little creeper. To her surprise the creeper was clinging to the stick. It was holding on by its tiny leaves! The leaves had little green threads which wound around the stick and tied the whole plant to it. Now there's magic for you!

Off ran Galya to tell Mother.

'But that's a pea plant—your live bead,' said Mother. 'I'm surprised you didn't guess.'

Galya brightened up at once, saying,

'But why does it cling to the stick?'

'To stand more strongly,' explained Mother. 'Just like your baby brother: he cannot stand up by himself, so he holds onto the back of the bed and pulls himself up.'

The red and blue beads continued to lie in Galya's matchbox. They stayed the same as before. Yet whenever she ran to see the live bead she would see something new.

Yesterday nothing happened, but today there was something white amidst the tiny leaves. Galya thought it was little moths. But it was tiny flowers. The live bead had blossomed. Where had it learned to do that? Two flowers on a single leg. Galya snapped them off, giving one to Mother and the other to her baby brother.

'Don't you touch,' said Mother, 'when they come out again.'

'Why's that?' asked Galya.

'The live bead needs them,' said Mother. 'You'll see what will become of them.'

And Galya did see: each flower would bloom for a bit and then its white petals would fade and drop. But out of the centre of the flower a pod would grow.

The pod would be transparent in the sunshine and you could see



dark little balls inside. Galya dearly wished to know what they were; but she took pity on the live bead and never touched its pods.

Those pods just went on growing. They became large and thick. When they turned yellow Mother said,

'Right, Galya, your pea plant is ripe.'

And she let Galya pick all the pods. And do you know what she found inside the pods? Little yellow beads: nice and round, smooth and weighty. Just as if they were from a shop, and precious too.

So Galya specially took them all for a walk. The little beads went along in pairs, so that ever such a long chain strung out: from one end of the table to the other. Yellow live beads walked in front, with a red pair and a blue pair bringing up the rear.

Galya said to them,

'Do you remember when a long time ago the yellow bead walked behind you? Now look ahead—these are all its little children. See how many it has. Too many for me to count, and certainly too many for my baby brother. Only Mother can count them now.'





THE HAPPINESS BULB

This autumn Dad brought me a big bulb from the south, saying,
‘There’s happiness in the middle of this bulb, my little girl.’
I was surprised: how could there be happiness in that ugly grey
bulb?

Mother planted my bulb in a pot and took it down into the cellar.
Several days went by and I had forgotten all about Dad’s present.
Then all at once Mother handed me the pot and there was a slender
yellow shoot.

‘Now you can grow a flower out of it,’ she said.

Mother placed the pot on the bathroom windowsill, covering the little
shoot with a paper hood and drawing the curtains to keep the room
cool. The flower needed that for a while so that it could grow in the
dark and cool.



From then on, as soon as I woke up, I would run barefoot into the bathroom just in my nighty. I would lift the hood and see if my flower had grown during the night, see if it had grown and filled out.

And it did: it grew and grew. And one day it sprouted leaves, and a thick stem peeped out of the middle, full of buds. Thereupon we moved the flower to a sunny window.

Just before the New Year it burst into flower. And what a lot of blossoms it had: as blue as blue could be, and Oh so sweet-smelling. And all of them were facing in different directions, as if they wanted to see everything about the room. How beautiful each little blossom was.

Dad said my flower was a hyacinth.

On New Year's Eve, when all our visitors had arrived, Dad turned out the light and said,

'Can I have your attention for a minute?'

Just then I quietly entered the room with Hyas in my hands. Straightaway bulbs were switched on and our visitors saw the wonderful hyacinth and clapped their hands. At that I placed Hyas in the centre of the table for everyone to admire. And they were all very happy.

So that was the happiness hidden in that ugly grey bulb.





MIDGEY-WIDGEY

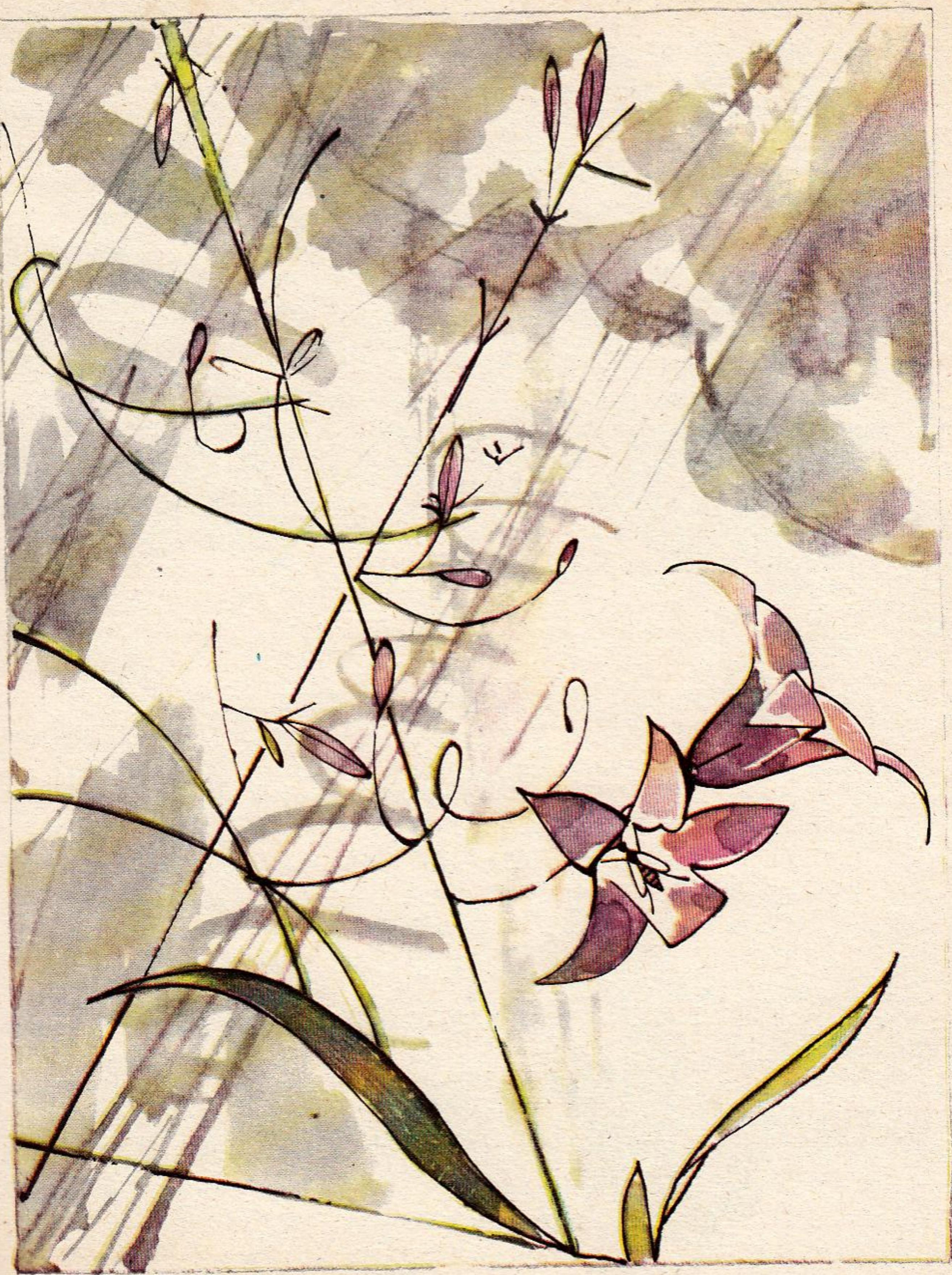
My brother Misha boasts that he can forecast the weather. But this summer he was wrong, so I don't believe him any more. True, it all went well to start with: he forecast rain for seven days, and so it was to the dot. And on the eighth day he announced it would be fine.

I was so pleased: I'd been itching to get to the meadow to draw the harebells; but the rain had stopped me. I brightened up now.

Before starting my drawing I decided to go and have a good look at the harebells.

All the harebells had their heads to one side, and one of them was looking straight at me. So I began to examine its podgy, fluffy tongue. Yet just then a fly alighted on the tongue. A tiny little midge about half the size of a mosquito. It sat down, then fluttered up to the blue ceiling and crawled inside the flower.

I peered inside. At the bottom inside the harebell lay a clump of dry jumbled-up threads, probably dried stamens. The midge wandered about among them for a while and then sat motionless upon the clump. It sat on and on like a mother hen on her eggs. Yet it was only a midge.



I was quite put out. Ages ago I had thought of studying insects, but there was nothing to study: and now my midgey-widgey was not batting an eyelid. You couldn't tell from his eyes whether he was asleep or not.

So I decided to stir him up. Yet just as I went to move my hand, a raindrop fell upon it. It would! Rain! And how it came down!

I got soaked to the skin as I was running home. How I came down on that weather forecaster!

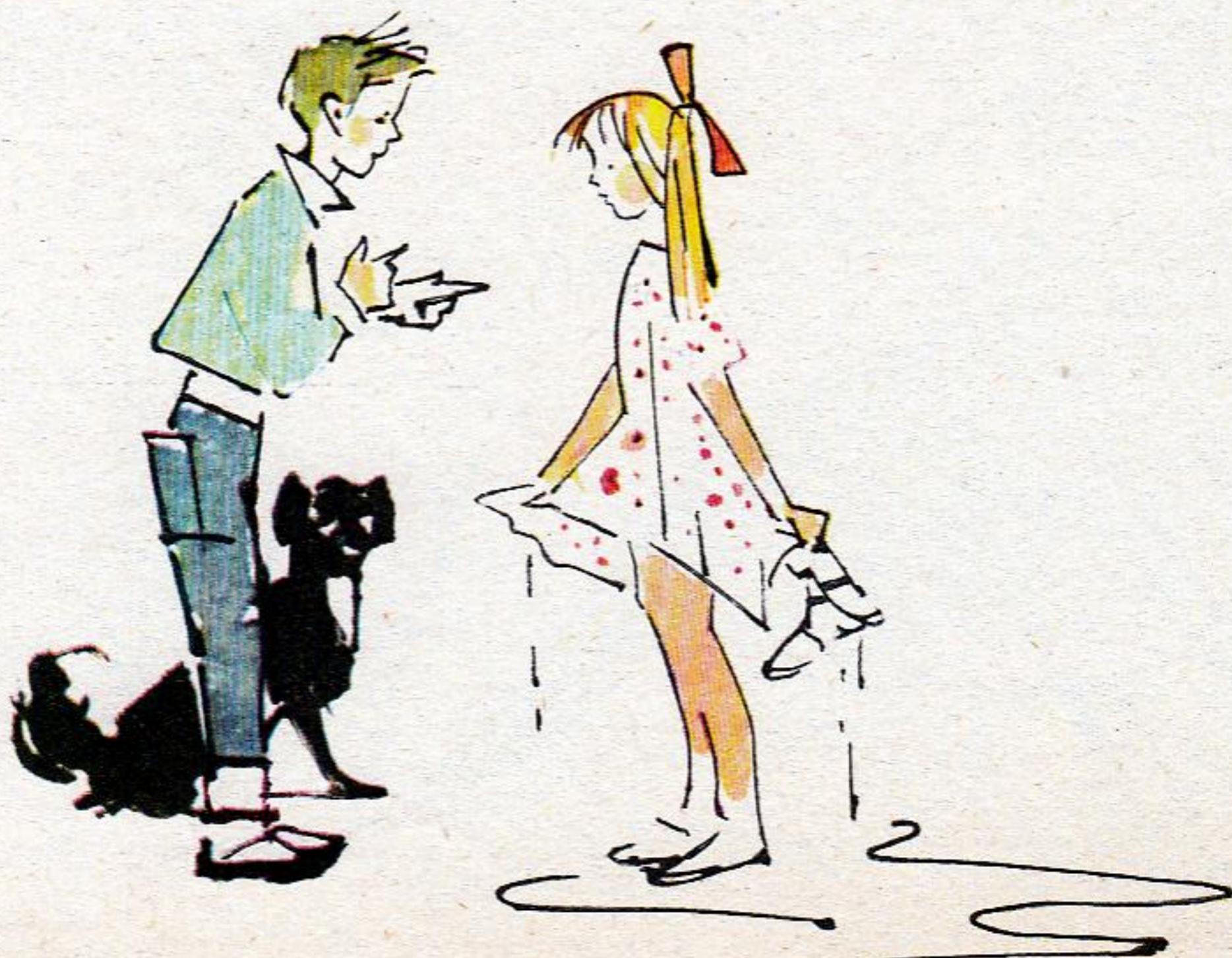
And all he said was,

'Serves you right. You should be ashamed of being so unobservant: didn't you see the rain cloud?'

'I was busy watching a silly old midgey-widgey.'

Then Misha explained,

'It felt rain coming on straightaway and hid in the clump. Yet you come rushing through the rain, get soaking wet and mad with me. There's your silly midge for you. It is a darn sight cleverer than you.'





THE PUMPKINLINGS

Do you know, children, that even a common or garden old pumpkin can sometimes surprise people.

Our Mother is very fond of pumpkins and every May, while it is still cold, cultivates pumpkin seedlings on the windowsill.

However, that spring my younger brother caught measles and Mother forgot all about pumpkins. Gran, of course, forgot to remind her. She always forgets everything.

So June arrived and it was already hot outside when Mother suddenly recalled her pumpkins and said,

‘Oh, dear, Oh dear. In past years I’ve already had seedlings by now, but all I’ve got is seeds lying inside the mother-pumpkin.’

At that she reached down a big yellow pumpkin from on top of the stove; it had been lying there since last year. The pumpkin had started to go bad, and one side had caved in. Mother was in the process of cutting out the bad parts, repeating to herself,

'I used to have seedlings by late May, now here I am taking out the seeds only now.'

Mother threw a mouldy piece into the bucket with her knife and then saw something astonishing.

'Come here quickly, children. Just look at that,' she cried.

Naturally, we all came running to take a look. And what a surprise! Pumpkinlings were growing inside the pumpkin. And what beauties. They had lovely white, thick, hairy stems and two yellow leaves upon the stems—one above the other. And the pumpkinlings were growing inside the pumpkin, as in a marsh: there was water in the base of the pumpkin.

Mother pulled out a baby pumpkin; it had a whole beardful of little roots, all matted in yellow pumpkin juice.

We were quite amazed with the pumpkinlings, though all Gran said was it was normal.

Mother gingerly brought the pumpkinlings out of the pumpkin and planted them in cardboard pots so that they could gain some strength in the room.

'So I have the seedlings after all,' Mother exclaimed. 'The mother-pumpkin has saved me: she raised her little children all by herself.'





LITTLE CUCKOO

1

I am very fond of little chicks. And last year my favourite hen, Blackie, suddenly began to cluck loudly. Naturally, I kept on at my Mother to sit her on eggs. But Mother would have none of it.

‘Better not ask me, Vic,’ she said. ‘Chicks are too much fuss, and I’ve got my hands full as it is, what with your Dad going off to the farm.’

But I told her,

‘Let me look after them myself, Mummy, you just put her on.’

I kept on at Mother and gave her no rest, begging her to put Blackie on the eggs.

In the end she lost patience with me and said,
'You're a little pest, Victoria!'

True enough: I can be a pest if I want. If I set my mind to it I always get my way. That morning Mother went off to the office and I made for the hen-coop.

We've a very interesting hen-coop. You certainly wouldn't find it straight off. Right behind our cottage is a big hill, just like a great ogress in a billowing green skirt. And in the very hem of that skirt is a door with a little glass window. That's our hen-coop. Dad dug it right out of the hill. He made the ceiling of wood, packed the walls with straw and, to hold it up, made a wooden trellis along all the walls. It turned out very well.

The hens lay their eggs just below the ceiling right on the earth, in holes.

So now I made one more hole in the far corner. Then I filled it with thirteen eggs; I picked out all of Blackie's—hers were darkish as if suntanned.

When I was lifting Blackie up to the nest she tried to struggle out of my arms. Then she settled down, spread herself out and started to roll the eggs under her with her beak. I heaped some straw in front of the nest. Just let anyone now try to find it, they would certainly have a hard job.

2

Mother came home from work and we had dinner. Then she collected food for the hens and was about to take it to them when I snatched the bowl from her, saying,

'I'll go and feed the hens myself, Mummy. I'll lock them up for the night now and let them out in the morning. I can do all that myself.'

Mother gave a laugh.

'We'll see how long your patience lasts,' she said.

But my patience lasted a whole week. It might have lasted longer if my friends had not come to go mushrooming in the woods. I was in such a flummox I clean forgot about the hens.

We got back late from the woods, round about seven. As I was running home I suddenly caught sight of Mother approaching with Blackie under one arm. It turned out that Mother was going to give Blackie a dousing to put a stop to her squawking. Blackie had got used to me taking her off the nest every day so she had come to Mother's notice at once. She'd let me down good and proper! I had to own up to Mother about everything. Well, as you can imagine, I got it in the neck.

Yet, for some reason, Mother decided not to douse Blackie after all. She returned home with the eggs from Blackie's nest and began to examine them in the light. If the inside was darkish, that meant the egg had a chick inside, if it was light, it hadn't.

So all the eggs were laid out: the first with a chick, the second, third... Even Mother grew quite excited. She's fond of chicks herself. Only the last egg seemed not to have a chick in it. But that was white, not at all one of Blackie's.

'But there're fourteen of them here,' Mother said. 'This one must be from Whitie'.

And then I remembered: one time I had taken Blackie down for a walk and then found Whitie sitting in her nest. But I didn't dream Whitie would lay an egg.

As Mother set Whitie's egg aside, I picked it up.

'Do you think a chick will hatch out of it too?' I asked.

'Yes, probably,' Mother replied. 'But it would hatch out a few days after the others, and a hen won't stay put up on a single egg. Just throw the egg away, there's a good girl Vic.'

But I didn't. I was keen to see what would happen. And quietly I slipped the egg back under Blackie.

But what a long time I had to wait for Blackie's chicks! I made a note on the calendar when they were due, and every morning I worked out how many days were left.

And then, finally, twenty one days were up, the date I had marked

down as the Big Day. I got up very very early. It was still quite gloomy in the hen-coop, but even in the doorway I could hear Blackie softly clucking away in her corner.

I slid my hand under her and felt a fluffy little body. A chick! Snatching it up I ran to wake Mother. I thought we would have to break open the other eggs to let out the chicks.

But Mother said we must never disturb either chicks or hens: they could manage by themselves.

Mother and I counted the empty shells. When the thirteenth hatched out, the last, Mother put Blackie and the chicks into a basket and carried them into the barn.

Then I took the secret Whitie's egg from the nest and wondered what to do with it. When Mother had said throw it out, it had simply been an egg. But now there was a little chick inside the shell.

Maybe some other hen would keep it warm? It was then I remembered that Aunt Katya had sat a hen on eggs recently.

Auntie Katya was baking pies and not at all pleased to see me. And when she knew why I had come she waved her hands at me.

'Good gracious me, not another egg!' she said. 'My poor hen is only small, you know.'

But I kept on and on and finally had my way.

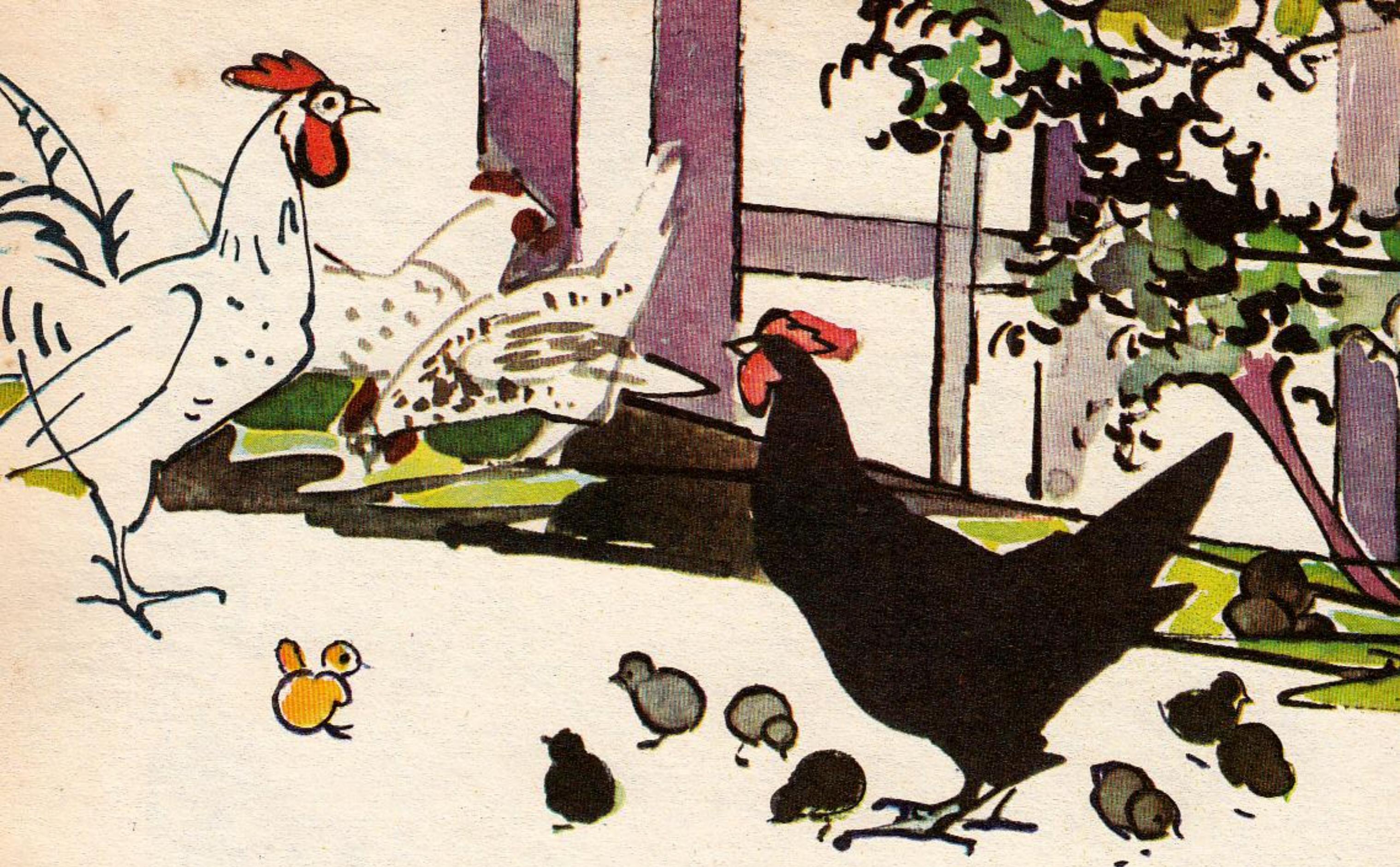
I must admit I did get on Aunt Katya's nerves from then on. I couldn't count all the times I ran to ask her whether the little chick was out.

But finally I was on my way to her when Aunt Katya herself came out to meet me. Handing me a little box she said,

'Right, now leave me in peace, I'm fed up with your little cuckoo.'

That was the name she gave my chick because she had hatched out in someone else's nest. What a lovely little chick my little Cuckoo was. Yellow all over and ever so fluffy, she even had fluffy legs. Her eyes were big and dark. Sitting in the palm of my hand she stared at me so calmly, as if we'd known each other for ages.





I ran to Mother with her and told her everything. She was a bit cross about me being so naughty, but then she said.

'I wonder whether Blackie will take to your Little Cuckoo?'

Blackie was scratching the ground with her claws, while the chicks scuttled around her. I held out Little Cuckoo in my hand and at once she puffed herself up, chirruped something, lifted her tiny wings and rushed to meet the other chicks. Hopping from my hand, she landed on the ground and toppled over.

At that Blackie stretched out her neck and said the same to her as to her own babies,

'Quo-quo.'

Then I pushed Cuckoo towards her and straightaway she edged forward and nestled into her feathers.

Next morning Mother and I were feeding the chicks. She was seeing to the black ones, I the fluffy yellow one.

'See how big and strong she is now,' I said proudly to Mother. 'See how sturdy she is on her legs. She'll run better than yours today.'

But it was not so. The little black chicks chirped happily, ran amongst the grass as if it was a jungle, pecked at this and that and even tried scratching the ground with their tiny claws.

But Little Cuckoo did not leave Blackie's side. She would take a few steps then run back to Mother, dive under her and bury herself in her feathers. Blackie would settle down to warm her, but only for the briefest moment, then she would be on her feet again. She was keen to walk on with the other babies.

Meanwhile Little Cuckoo would be sprawling upon the ground and shakily standing up, ever so sleepy. She did not seem to know whether she was still in the egg or in some unknown realm. I felt so sorry for her, yet consoled myself with the thought that she would soon grow strong.

'After all, in four days or so she will be as tough as those pellets,' I told myself.

For the first few days I never forgot to give Little Cuckoo a little extra. But probably that was not enough, because Blackie spent the whole day rummaging about the ground looking for something tasty for her chicks. She would seize a worm in her beak and summon her chicks with a 'ko-key-key'.

And they came running from all directions. The first one to get there would have the worm. There was no queuing. Little Cuckoo would run at the call too, but she was always last. She'd look up as if to say,

'Mother, what did you call me for? Do tell me why.'

The little black chicks grew up very fast, while our yellow Little Cuckoo seemed to lag more and more behind. The blacks soon had feathers sprouting from their tiny wings, and real feathers, like bird's feathers. Blackie began to lead her chicks far afield, even up the hill.

One time Mother sent me to feed the chicks, and I called them to me,

“Tsip, tsip, tsip.”

No Blackie and no chicks. All of a sudden, little birds came flying down the hill, followed by a big black bird. It was Blackie. How funny it was to see: the chicks came flying along just like sparrows.

But, alas, Little Cuckoo was not with them. Quickly I scattered the oats upon the ground and climbed up the hill, looking for Little Cuckoo. But I could not find her anywhere. By now I was sure a kite had got her and I began to descend the hill, when suddenly I heard someone piping in the grass. It was Little Cuckoo! She was lying there, her little wings beating the grass, her claws all tangled up in a clump of weeds.

It was a long time since I had picked her up and I was surprised to find her so skinny and scraggy. The tiny feathers on her wings were



only just poking out of their little piping. As I bore her along she was cheeping and cheeping without cease.

4

I knew now that Little Cuckoo would never catch up her little sisters and brothers. And I no longer felt any thrill when Mother came out and we had to feed Little Cuckoo. No matter how much you gave her she remained just as scrawny as ever. It even hurt to look at her.

Mother got quite cross, but more and more often I ran off at feeding time. I'd say I was going for flowers or berries.

'You've got quite beyond me, Victoria,' Mother would say. 'I hope your Father returns soon.'

Blackie's family lived in our barn until the chicks had learned to sit on the perch on their own. They would show us themselves when they were ready. We had a stack of poles in the yard and the chicks would space themselves out upon them, with Blackie sitting below on the ground, Little Cuckoo under her wing. Little Cuckoo now had all her feathers, yet not once did she try to fly up even to the lowest rung. She was already used to failing in her attempts.

Mother had decided to transfer Blackie to the hen-coop, but because of Little Cuckoo she said,

'For the time being I shall have to sit her on the perch myself every night.'

And so she did. All went well until one day she gave me the job. That was when I found I needed all my patience. And I was always short of that, which is why things went badly.

Blackie and all her black children were sitting on the perch, while Little Cuckoo was squatting on the ground by the straw wall.

I sat her next to her little brother. But the brother pecked her. So I set her down at the other end, next to a little sister. She did not touch her, just inclined her head towards her. But Little Cuckoo took fright, pulled her head into her shoulders and flew back to her old place.

'Are you coming, Victoria?' Mother was calling me. 'We have to get ready for the pictures.'

'Just coming,' I shouted back.

I wanted to catch Little Cuckoo, but she kept dodging and scuttled into a far corner. At that I lost my temper.

'Right, stay where you like,' I shouted. 'I haven't time to fuss with you.'

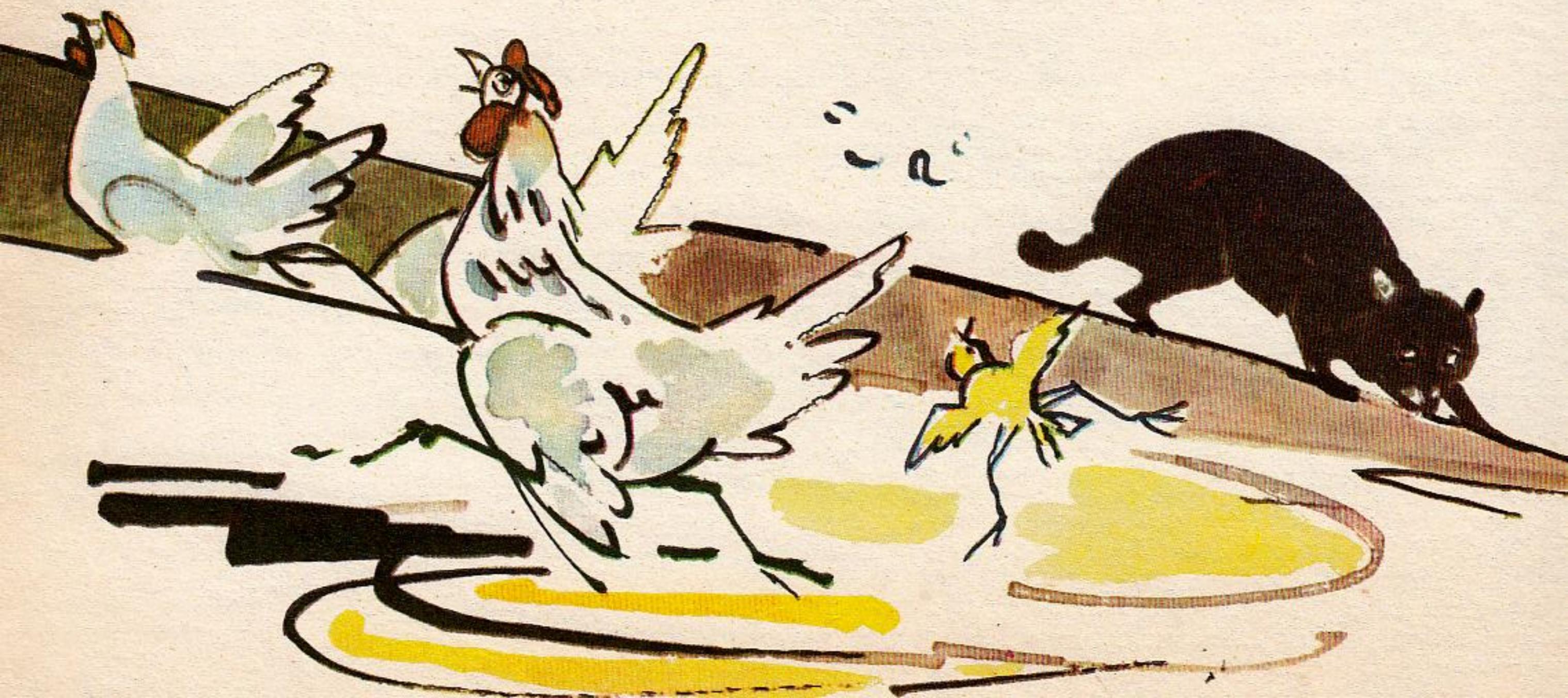
Mother and I returned late from the pictures. It was dark and I went ahead carrying a torch. I was in a happy mood, singing a tune I had heard in the film.

All at once Mother said,

'Hold on, Vic, did you hear that? Isn't that our hens?'

It was then I caught a squawking from afar. Mother and I set off quickly but I was naturally the first to reach the hen-coop. What on earth was going on? I had never heard hens kick up such a row in my life before. I was so frightened I could hardly unlock the door, unable to fit the key in place.

As Mother came up she unlocked the door. There were white



feathers everywhere and on the ground lay Little Cuckoo on her side, her legs outstretched.

'Give me the torch, Vic,' said Mother bending over Little Cuckoo.

'She's still alive,' she cried. 'Bring a basket.'

When I had brought the basket, Mother transferred Little Cuckoo to it; she was all blood-stained.

'There's a hole over there in the corner, straight from the hill,' Mother said. 'I blocked it up with a stone.'

Indoors Mother put iodine on Little Cuckoo's wounds, and sewed up the biggest of them. Then she tipped some wine and warm milk down her gullet. All the while, Little Cuckoo lay on the table motionless, her eyes closed.

'Mummy, will she come to life again?' I murmured. 'Do you think she'll live?'

'I don't know,' Mother replied. 'But I shall do all I can to save her.'

Mother sat on the bed, her arms dangling between her knees. Her face was sad and weary. I suddenly felt a wave of pity for her. Coming up to her I pressed close and said,

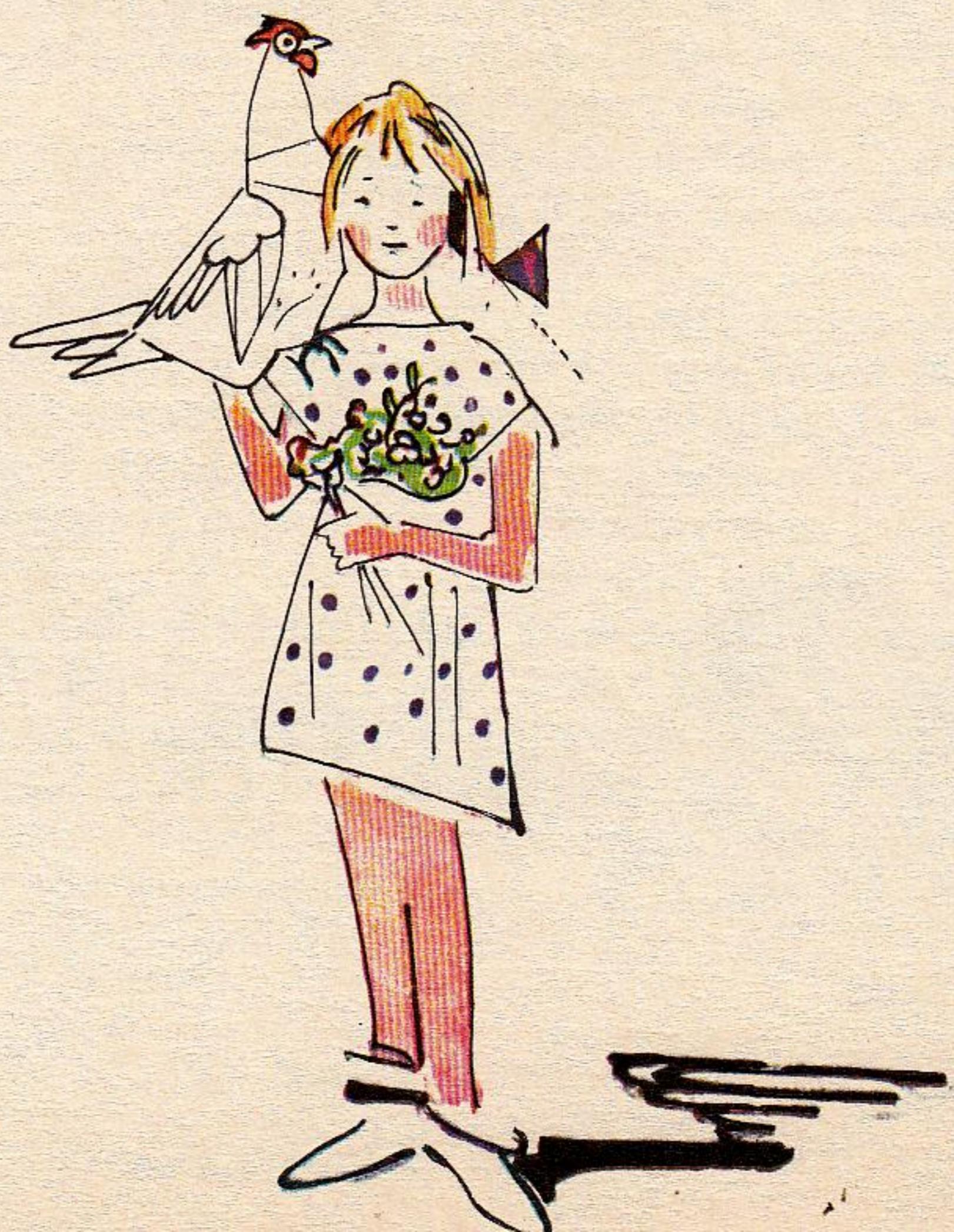
'Mummy, I shan't be naughty again. You'll see. I'll do everything myself from now on. You'll see.'

And that time I kept my word. Mother did not have to bother about Little Cuckoo any more: I did not forget her. For the first few days I gave her milk to drink, then she began to lift her head by herself and peck at cottage cheese and oats out of my hand. The only trouble was she continued to lie awkwardly at the bottom of the basket and we were afraid her legs had been hurt.

However, one day we woke up to find Little Cuckoo had climbed out and was sitting on the basket edge. How overjoyed Mother and I were. Next day Little Cuckoo started to wander across the floor. And it was not long before she had completely recovered. Only her tail remained damaged, cocked to one side. That was no great loss: after all, Little Cuckoo was a hen, not a cock; and hens don't need fine tails.

Even so, no one has a better hen than me. The moment she used to see me she would come running and fly on to my shoulder. That hen was worth her weight in gold.

And the wild animal that had almost eaten her had been caught the very next day in a hen-coop trap. It was the first time I had seen such a terrible monster: he had a brown back, yellow jowls and black stomach. Mother gave him to the school pets corner, and there they said it was a hamster.





FAIRY TALES





LITTLE MOUSE LOSES HIS WAY

The fieldmouse's Mother gave him a dandelion stalk wheel, with this warning,

'Here, roll your wheel but stay close to home.'

'Pip-piti-pip,' squeaked the little mouse. 'I shall roll my wheel and have a good game.'

And he rolled the wheel down the hillside path. He rolled and rolled and had such fun that he did not notice he was lost. Last year's lime nuts lay scattered on the ground and, up above, through the leafy lacework, bloomed white and yellow thickets of flowers. This certainly was a strange place. The little mouse came to a halt. Then, to keep his spirits up, he lay his wheel upon the ground and sat right in the middle of it. He sat there thinking to himself,

'Mother told me to stay close to home. But where's close to home now?'

Thereupon he noticed the grass quivering yonder and a frog came hopping out.

'Pip-piti-pip,' piped the little mouse. 'Tell me, please, froggie, where is close to home and where is my Mother?'

To his good fortune, the frog knew and answered,

'Keep straight on, dead ahead under those flowers. And you will come to a triton. He has only just crawled out from under a stone and is lying there catching his breath before diving into a pond. Turn left past the triton and run along the path straight on. There you'll come upon a white butterfly. She is sitting on a blade of grass waiting for someone. From the white butterfly turn left again and give your Mother a shout; she will hear you.'

'Thank you,' said the little mouse.

He picked up his wheel and rolled it along in between the stems and under the thickets of white and yellow anemones. But it was not long before the wheel got stuck: first it bumped into stem, then another, stuck fast and finally tumbled over. All the while, the little mouse would not let go, he pushed and tugged until, finally, he drove it onto the path.

Then he remembered all about the triton. He had to meet the triton before going on. But he missed him simply because the triton had dived into the pond while the little mouse was driving his wheel along. So the little mouse did not know where to turn left.

Once more he drove his wheel along, following his nose. This time he came to a patch of tall grass; and trouble struck again: the wheel got stuck so fast that it would not move backward or forward.

It took him ages to free it and only then did the little mouse remember the white butterfly. After all, he had not met her yet.

In the meantime, the white butterfly had been sitting on the blade of grass until it got tired and flew away. So the little mouse never did find out where to turn left.

Luckily for him, the little mouse ran into a bee flying to some red currant blossoms.

'Pip-piti-pip,' cried the little mouse. 'Tell me, please, bee, where is close to home and where is my Mother?'

It so happened that the bee knew, so it now replied,

'Run down the hill and there you will see something yellow in a



hollow. You will find little tables covered in lace tablecloths with yellow bowls upon them. The flowers are called golden saxifrage. Climb up the hill from the saxifrage and there you will see flowers like sunspots and, alongside, fluffy white balls on lanky legs. These are flowers known as coltsfoot; turn right from them and straightaway call your mother and she will hear you.'

'Thank you,' said the little mouse.

He picked up his wheel and it ran downhill all by itself. And so fast that the little mouse could hardly keep up. In no time at all he found himself in the hollow. And there he saw the little tables covered in yellow lace tablecloths with yellow bowls upon them.

'Pip-piti-pip,' cried the little mouse. 'Here is the golden saxifrage. It won't be long before I'm home now. The flowers can't run away, the

flowers can't fly off, the flowers can't let me down, Pip-piti-pip.'

He began to make his way up the hill, but the wheel again ran into trouble. It kept rolling back downhill and did not want to climb up. No matter how hard the little mouse pushed and tugged, it was no use. It kept toppling over, getting stuck, and in the end he had to abandon it.

At last the little mouse reached the top of the hill, but he could not see the yellow flowers. There were no fluffy white balls either.

While the little mouse had been carting his wheel along, the flowers had closed up, with evening advancing; flowers and the fluffy balls of the coltsfoot always close up for the night.

So the little mouse did not find out where he had to turn right. Where was he to run to now? It was already getting dark and he could see no one around. The little mouse sat down under a leaf and wept. And he wept so loudly that his mother heard him and came running. How overjoyed he was to see her. And she even more: she had nearly given up hope of finding her little son alive. And side by side they ran happily home.





THE GREAT WONDER

1

A rainworm was born under a rotten stump upon the earth, and lived the whole year in darkness, digging holes. He would only peep out at twilight so as to collect and drag fallen leaves into his underground home. They were his favourite food.

But one day, after a heavy summer shower, the rainworm had to push his way up through flooded holes.

The earth was wet and soft. The sun shone through the clouds and gently caressed, rather than burnt, the rainworm's delicate skin. The grass and trees were shedding the last drops of rain. It was so enjoyable that the rainworm felt he had crawled out just to look at the light of day. So he announced,

'I have come to see how you are all getting on out here.'

'Good, have a good look,' the grass and trees answered him in welcome. They knew and liked him; after all he lived in firm friendship with their roots. 'Crawl around a bit and you will see many wonders'.

'It's scarey crawling about on my own,' said the rainworm. 'If only I had a companion.'

Hardly had he uttered those words than he saw a caterpillar climbing off a half-eaten shrub. The caterpillar was smooth and long, just a mate for the worm, only not so pink; it was striped and green.

'Since all around is green, it is hardly surprising that worms are dressed in green,' thought the rainworm. 'But why is that green worm crawling in such an un-worm-like way? Ah, I see now. It has little legs on its stomach. That's probably one of those wonders about which the grass and trees spoke.'

And the rainworm asked loudly,

'A worm crawling on legs, is that a wonder?'

'No, that isn't a wonder,' the grass and trees answered him.

When the caterpillar had crawled closer, the rainworm said to it,

'Let's go for a walk together. Let's see what wonders there are in the world.'

'Come on then,' agreed the caterpillar. 'I was just sitting on that shrub chewing its leaves. And now I suddenly feel like crawling and crawling, I don't care where.'

So off they crawled. The rainworm crawled along pushing the front half of his body forward, stopping and bringing up the back part. And the caterpillar crawled along in its own way, using its legs.

On the way they met some ants and snails. They were all old friends of the rainworm. Some of the snails even had their home under the same rotten stump where he had been born.

But then on a low pink flower the rainworm saw an altogether unfamiliar and amazing insect, with tiny blue leaves growing on its back. The insect poked its head over the very heart of the flower and



seemed to be lost in thought. Suddenly the tiny leaves on its back opened up, closed together, opened up again and the insect abandoned the flower and rose into the air.

The rainworm could not stifle his amazement. How could it hang in the air like that and not fall?

The caterpillar explained calmly,

‘That is a butterfly; it has wings and it flies.’

‘Flies?’ repeated the rainworm. ‘No one ever flies among us underground.’

And he enquired loudly,

‘Is a flying animal a wonder?’

‘Yes, it is a little wonder,’ the grass and trees answered him.

‘Well, let it be a wonder,’ said the caterpillar. ‘But I would fly too if only I had wings.’

2

The caterpillar and the rainworm journeyed all day. They saw a lot of wonderful things. They saw little frogs skilfully hopping high in the air; they saw flowers opening and closing; they saw the glowworm shining through the gloom.

Yet the grass and trees assured the rainworm that these were still only little wonders. In fact, the friends were not to see any big wonder that day.

They crawled towards the cosy light of the glowworm and settled for the night under the broad leaf of a plantain.

The glowworm was sitting on the ceiling with its green little lamp lighting up the whole room under the plantain leaf.

The rainworm suddenly saw the caterpillar digging a hole and carefully making a bed for itself.

‘What a delicate one you are,’ said the rainworm. ‘We’re only spending one night here, you know.’

‘I don’t know what’s up with me,’ answered the caterpillar. ‘I always used to sleep without a bed, simply under a leaf. But now I just fancied making myself a good bed to sleep in for ages and ages.’



'Well then, I shan't let you sleep for ages,' said the rainworm. 'I'll wake you up.'

3

But the worm did not have to rouse the caterpillar. Next morning he could not find it. His friend had vanished. And in the hole where it had been and had made its bed, the rainworm saw a longish brownish thing. At one end it was rounded, and at the other sharpcornered. The round end had little knobs and grooves on, like eyes, paws and little wings, while the sharp end was all covered in rings. Now here was an amazing thing! The rainworm accidentally pushed it and, all of a sudden, it began to move.

'It's alive,' exclaimed the rainworm in astonishment.

'Don't you recognise it?' asked someone from the roof.

It was the glowworm. His light went out in the morning and the rainworm had not even noticed him.

'Don't you recognise it? Why, that's your friend. It slipped off its green skin in the night and turned into what you see now—a chrysalis.'

The rainworm was very surprised and asked loudly,

'Is not an animal turning into a chrysalis a big wonder?'

'Not such a big wonder,' answered the grass and trees. 'But if you want to see a big wonder, why don't you call upon your friend later?'

'All right,' said the rainworm. Thereupon he bade farewell to the glowworm, dug a little hole and disappeared underground.

He used to visit his sleeping friend right up to winter. The plantain leaves grew brown and lay snugly on the ground. The grasses had all died away. The trees grew sad, bidding farewell to their dying leaves. Meanwhile the chrysalis remained unmoving in its hollow. The weather then turned cold, and the rainworm, hiding from the frosts, disappeared deeper into the earth. There he made himself a little chamber, rolled up into a ball and went to sleep till spring.

4

In springtime he recalled the journey, the wonders he had seen and his chrysalis friend. And he decided to pay it a visit.

But now he could not even recognise the familiar place: a carpet of last year's leaves lay upon the ground. How was he to find the little hollow under them? The rainworm was very downhearted, but there was nothing for it but stretch out on the ground to rest.

Suddenly he felt someone moving beside him. He unrolled and saw that from under the ground, parting the leaves, some sort of insect was crawling out. At first there appeared a head with big eyes, then a shaggy chest and long legs. After that the entire insect climbed out into the open and crawled along a stem.



'It is like a butterfly,' thought the rainworm. 'Only its wings aren't quite right: they are crumpled like autumn leaves in my narrow hole.'

At that the strange butterfly, clinging to the stem, began to wave its peculiar wings.

Gradually they straightened out and grew strong. And soon after it became a very real butterfly with patterned wings like little leaves.

'Where did you come from?' the rainworm asked it.

The butterfly turned at his voice and immediately hopped down from the stem to the ground.

'Hello there, rainworm,' it said. 'Do you remember when we crawled along how I told you I felt like flying?'

'It surely can't be you?' said the rainworm, unable to believe his own ears.

'Yes, it's me, your friend,' said the butterfly. 'You saw me as a caterpillar, but you also saw me as a chrysalis. Do you remember how I

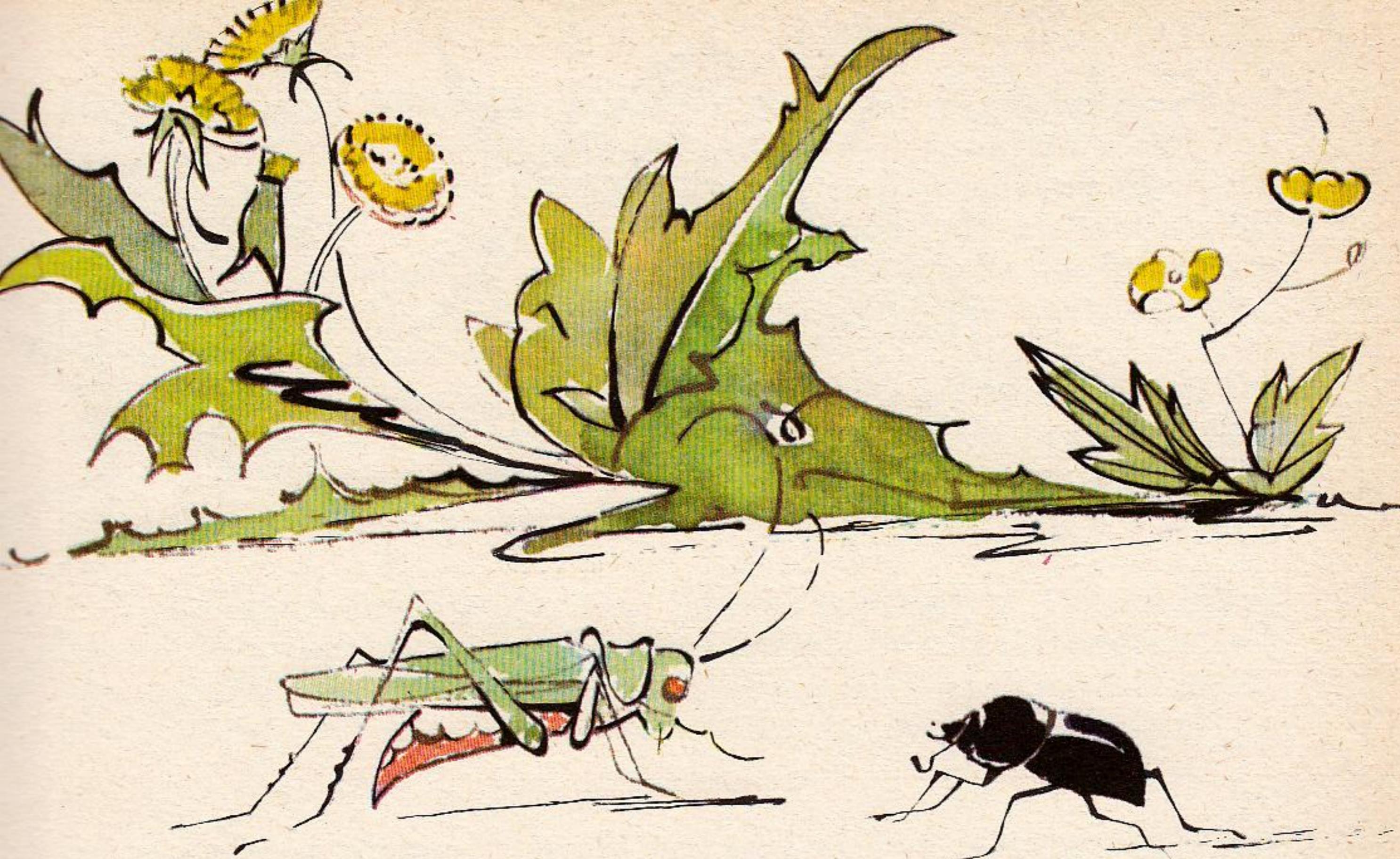
then had a hard brown skin? I've now torn it off and climbed out to freedom. And now I'm going to fly. Just you watch me fly. Afterwards I'll fly to see you at your place.'

'You used to be a worm and now you've got wings!' said the rainworm. 'I surely don't have to ask—this is the big wonder.'

'Yes, this is the big wonder,' came back the voice of the grass and the trees.

So now the rainworm was completely happy: his friend had come back and at long last he had seen a really big wonder.





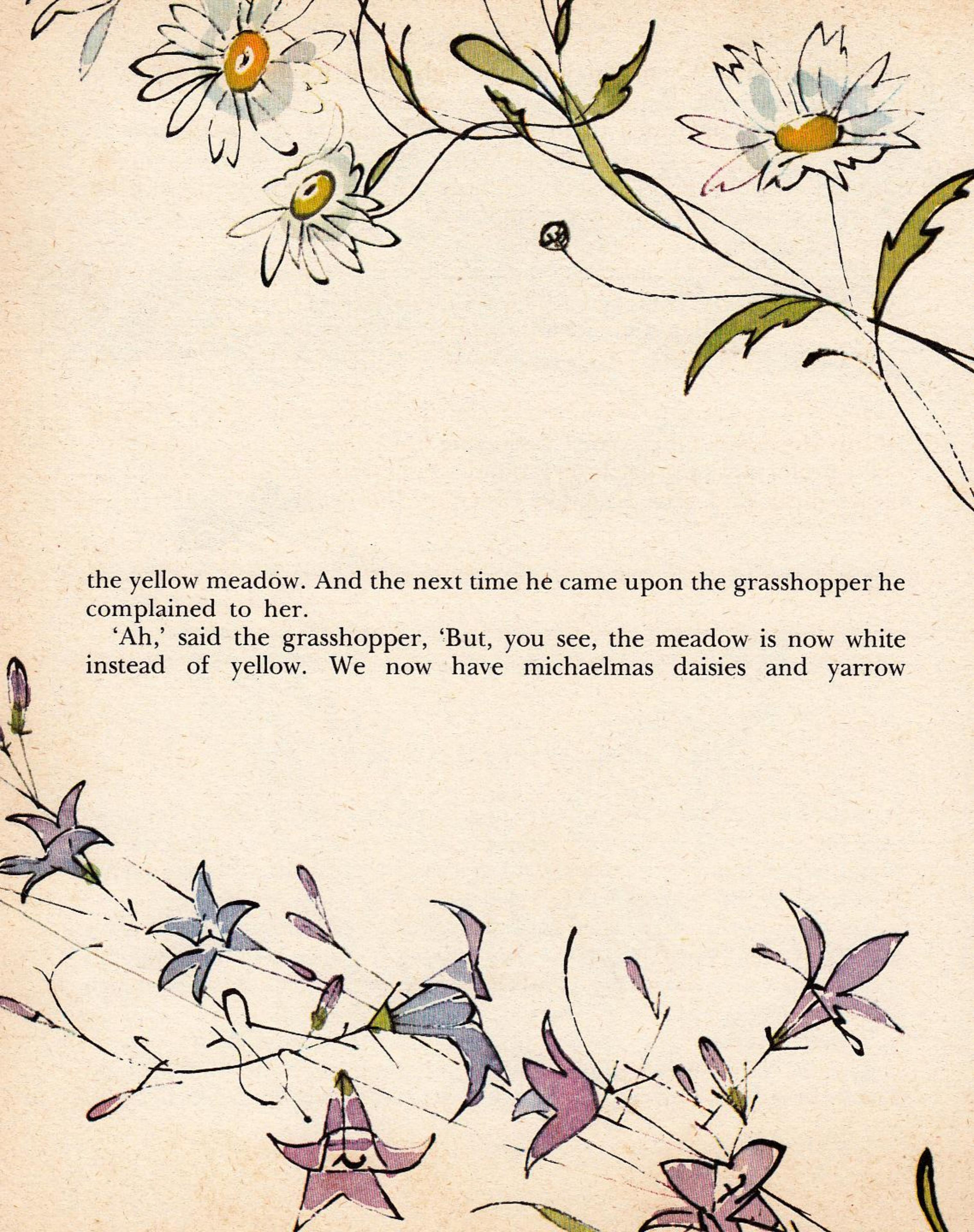
YELLOW, WHITE AND LILAC

It was such a fine spring day that even the dung-beetle felt like opening his dusty wings and flying to see if there was anything in the world better than his own wide sunlit road. And, seeing a frisky young grasshopper, he asked where it lived.

‘In the merry yellow meadow,’ said the grasshopper. ‘We have dandelions and buttercups flowering there. How the buttercup’s petals shine: you can see another grasshopper’s face in them. Just like when you look into water.’

‘I shall fly over and see for myself,’ said the dung-beetle.

And he began to get ready. But, as was his custom, he dawdled and dawdled for ages and ages until, when he did fly off, he could not find



the yellow meadow. And the next time he came upon the grasshopper he complained to her.

‘Ah,’ said the grasshopper, ‘But, you see, the meadow is now white instead of yellow. We now have michaelmas daisies and yarrow

flowering there. When you walk through them it's just like a cloud hovering over you. And what a lovely smell!'

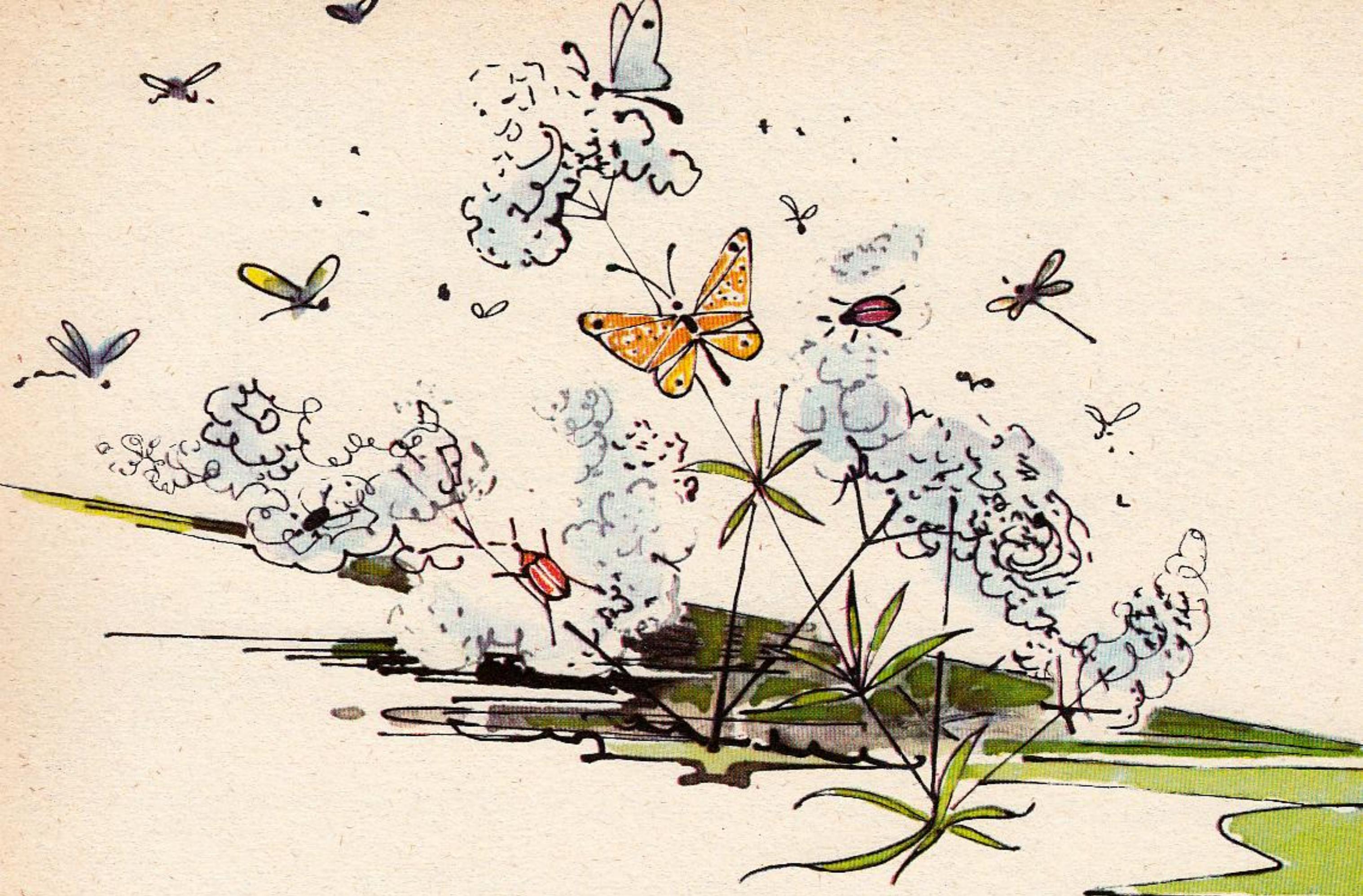
'I'll fly over and smell them for myself,' said the dung-beetle.

And he began to make preparations. But, as was his custom, he dawdled and dawdled for ages and ages until, when he did fly off, he could not find the white meadow. And when he next met the grasshopper he began to complain.

'Ah,' said the grasshopper, 'the meadow isn't white any more, it's lilac. We have harebells and wild geraniums and sweet peas flowering there now. You ought to see the funny creepers on the sweet peas. They cling on to the blades of grass. It's such fun to have a swing on them.'

'You swing as much as you like,' said the dung-beetle. 'I'm not flying off anywhere any more. You'll be having black flowers there tomorrow. No, I prefer my own patch of ground. Dung's always dung, and dust's always dust. And grey is always easier on the eye.'





CLOUD-LIKE

The yarrow was quite small still: it had a slender little stalk and tiny narrow leaves in three tiers. It still had a long way to grow and it did not yet know what sort of blossoms it would have.

'Will you alight on me when I blossom?' it asked a gaudy gadfly. 'I shall have great big flowers with yellow balls.'

'Don't tell fibs,' said the gaudy gadfly. 'I know what sort of blossoms you'll have: clusters of tiny white flowers each smaller than my head.'

'No, not at all. Much bigger than that,' exclaimed the yarrow bursting into tears.

But when it saw a lovely white butterfly, it again set to dreaming.

'Do you know what blossoms I shall have?' it said. 'Great big ones with a blue hood like a harebell. Will you come and see me then?'

'Don't tell fibs,' said the white butterfly. 'I know what sort of flowers you'll have: clusters of little white ones smaller than my eyes.'

'No, not at all. Much bigger than that,' exclaimed the yarrow and burst into tears.

It wept until the rain came down. And after the rain it made the acquaintance of a raindrop and told it all about its troubles.

'I want to have bigger beautiful blossoms,' it said. 'I want all the world to see them plainly; everyone to come and visit me. I certainly don't want tiny flowers smaller than a gadfly's head and smaller than a butterfly's eye!'

'Calm yourself,' said the raindrop. 'Do you see that round cloud up there? I used to live in that very same cloud. And do you know, it is entirely made up of drops that are so teeny-weeny they are invisible. But just look at the cloud. Everyone can see it. Maybe the same will happen to you: your flowers will be small, but plentiful.'

'Yes, lots and lots of them,' cried the yarrow brightening up.

And it gave no more thought to its flowers.

And when it became quite grown up and blossomed, it recalled the little raindrop. It really did have lots and lots of teeny-weeny blossoms and they sat so thickly on their stalks that all together they resembled a little cloud. And from all corners of the meadow the midges and bugs came flying to that fluffy white cloud.

'What a silly little fool I used to be,' said the yarrow. 'Now why did I want those big blossoms?'





WINTER REVELS

All through the summer a hare was feeding a lame squirrel; a wicked boy had broken one of her legs. When the squirrel was better she said goodbye to the hare, thanking him for his kindness.

'Don't you put anything by for the winter,' she said. 'You fed me all summer, I'll look after you in winter.'

But from that day on the hare never saw the squirrel. The last patch of grass vanished beneath the snow, leaving the little hare hungry; all that remained were bare twigs and bark. When times were bad he often had nothing to eat at all; then he would think of the squirrel and cheer up at once.

'If only I could find her,' he would think, 'what a good time we'd have.'

And then one day the hare at last came upon the squirrel. She was sitting on a dry branch by her hollow.

'Hello there,' cried the hare. 'What luck to find you. It so happens I've had nothing to eat all day.'

'Right, right, I'll put on the kettle for a friend,' said the squirrel. 'Just you fetch me some birch twigs and I'll make a fire from them.'

'Right away, right away, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare, dashing off.

But the squirrel was crafty. She began to regret her promise to share her supplies, and that was why she had sent the poor hare packing.

'By the time he finds some birch twigs,' she thought, 'I'll have shifted all my supplies to another hollow and I'll pretend a marten ate me up.'

But the squirrel had scarcely had time to thread a needle to mend her sack than the hare was back.

'Here we are,' he cried all out of breath. 'Some birch twigs for you, Missie Fuss-Pot.'

'You're back quickly,' said the squirrel.

'It isn't hard to find birch twigs,' said the hare. 'You can see the silver branches gleaming from the edge of the woods.'

'That's true,' thought the squirrel. 'I'll have to be craftier next time.'

'Now I've got plenty of tinder,' she continued. 'But I've nothing to light it with. If you'd be good enough to fetch me some aspen twigs I can make matches out of them.'

'Right away, right away, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare, dashing off again.

Meanwhile the squirrel thought to herself,

'He won't come across aspen in a hurry at this time of year. After all, all trees look alike without their leaves, only the silver birch is different from the rest because of its silver bark.'

But hardly had the squirrel sewn the first patch on her sack than the hare was back.

'Here you are, Missie Fuss-Pot, here are your aspen twigs.'

'You're back quickly,' said the squirrel.

'It's not that hard to find the aspen,' said the hare. 'Its branches stand up straight and strong like stakes on fences. Aspens are slender, straight and greyish-green with bitter bark.'

'That's true,' thought the squirrel. 'I'll have to think up something craftier still.'

'I'll just put the kettle on,' she said to the hare. 'But how am I going to lay the table when I haven't a table to lay? Now if you were to fetch

me some good strong oak branches, I could saw up some boards and make myself a good oak table.'

'Right away, right away, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare, racing off. Meanwhile, the squirrel was thinking,

'Well, you won't find an oak so easily in wintertime.'

But the squirrel had hardly had time to drop ten nuts into her sack than the hare was back.

'Here are your oak branches, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare.

'You're back quickly,' said the squirrel.

'Oh, it isn't hard to find the oak,' said the hare. 'The oak is big and strong and rough with dry leaves hanging on its branches in winter, like flags.'

'That's true,' thought the squirrel. 'I'll have to be craftier still.'

'I can make a table now,' she said to the hare, 'but I've nothing to scrub it down with. Now if you were to fetch me some lime bast...'

'Right away, right away, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare, dashing off.

Meanwhile the squirrel thought to herself,

'You won't find a lime in a hurry in wintertime.'

But the squirrel had scarcely time to tie up her sack of nuts than the hare was back.

'Well, here we are,' he said. 'Here's your lime bast, Missie Fuss-Pot.'

'You're back quickly,' she said.

'Well, it isn't hard to find the lime tree,' said the hare. 'Each of its branches is bent in the middle, as if a baby bear had sat right in the middle of them.'

'That's true enough,' thought the squirrel. 'I really must think of something craftier than ever this time.'

'We'll have a real feast soon enough, but what sort of feast will it be without music?' she said. 'Now if you were to fetch me some maple branches I could make a balalaika out of them.'

'Right away, right away, Missie Fuss-Pot,' said the hare, rushing off.

Meanwhile the squirrel was thinking to herself,

'He surely won't find any maple in the depths of winter!'

Yet hardly had she had time to hump the sack of nuts upon her back than the hare was back.



'Well, here are your maple branches, Missie Fuss-Pot,' he cried. 'You're back quickly,' she said.

'Well, it isn't that hard to find the maple,' said the hare. 'You find its switches sitting in pairs, just like a man sitting there arms aloft: his body is the branch, his arms are the switches. Only you've had me scampering all over the place, Missie Fuss-Pot. Still, never mind, I'd be silly not to put myself out for such a feast. Anyway, my legs are big and strong, not like yours. When I was bandaging your leg last summer I was wondering how your poor little legs would bear your weight as you leapt around.'

At that the squirrel remembered how much the hare had looked after her, how he has fed her through the summer, and she felt ashamed of herself.

'Come and sit down for a bit, poor hare,' said the squirrel quietly and kindly. 'I'll have it ready in a jiffy.'

And it wasn't long before she had made matches out of the aspen, lit the birch tinder, heated up the kettle, made an oak table, scrubbed it down with lime bast and laid it with all manner of goodies. She piled it high as for a big feast.

And when she and the hare had ate their fill, the squirrel tuned up her maple balalaika and struck up a tune. And she and the hare had such a fine time that even the nearby trees regretted they had no feet to dance along with them.





A BEETLE'S LIVING ROOM

The newborn beetle did so much crawling, flying and pottering about in celebrating his first day of life that, by evening, he was very tired; he could not move a leg or whisker.

He lay down in the centre of a big yellow flower. The flower was more flat than bowl-shaped, covered in lots of narrow petals, as soft as soft can be. It gave off lovely honey-like smell. And it was still warm, so strongly had the sun heated it up that day.

The sun had just sunk below the hill. And the sky, which was a light lilac blue as if it had forget-me-nots blossoming in its meadows, gradually turned red, as if poppies had all come out at sunset.

And now the first little star was twinkling in the sky. The newborn beetle shook himself: he so wanted to fly, to fly up yonder and circle round that little winking star.

All of a sudden, he felt the flower beneath him trembling. At that he clung on tighter to it with his legs.

‘Maybe the flower wants to fly up yonder too?’ thought the newborn fellow.

Thereupon he saw yellow walls popping up all round him. They were becoming taller and taller, and the sky was getting narrower and narrower. Only the little star continued to shine, though it too was



contracting. Suddenly it flickered and went out. And all around became quite dark, as dark as dark could be.

'How did this flower suddenly curl itself up like that?' wondered the newborn beetle as he dropped off to sleep.

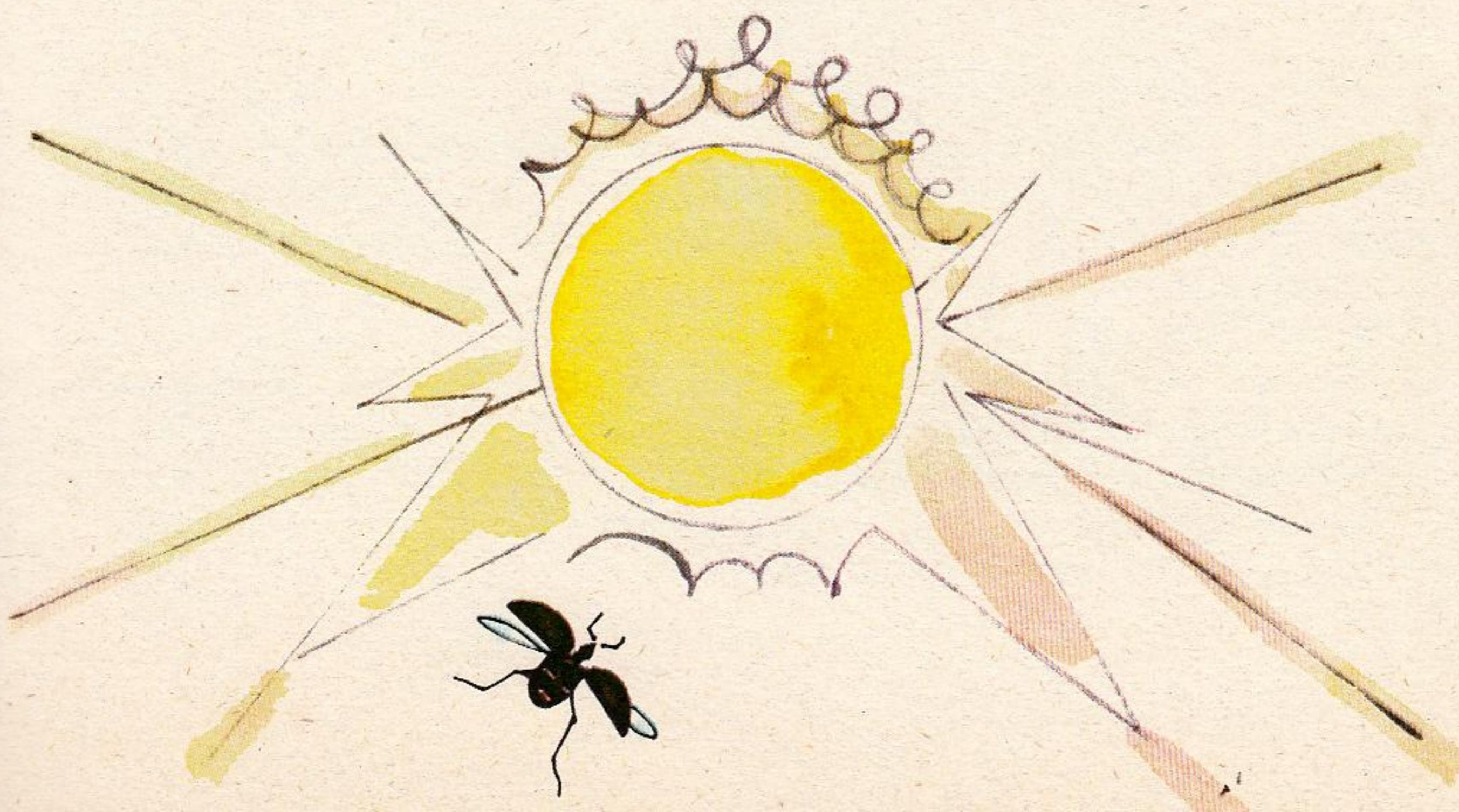
On the second morning of his life, the beetle woke up at the bottom of a dark sack. He tried to scramble up the soft wall, but all to no avail. Sadly he sat at the bottom of the closed flower and thought he would never see the sunshine again.

All of a sudden, he felt the flower trembling. And straightaway the light poured in. It flooded in through a little crack that had not been there before; it was getting wider and wider all the time. And the yellow walls around him quietly moved back. The flower had flat petals once again.

Now the beetle could see the sun riding behind the forest. And when its rays fell upon the beetle, he felt strong at once and cheered up.

'I can fly,' he cried to the sun.

And, spreading his wings, he took off from the edge of the flower and flew off wherever the fancy took him.





WIND, ANT AND LITTLE BIRD

1

One day Blower-wind, little Pecker-bird and Hoarder-ant all came together. They fell to chatting and became such firm friends that they decided never to part—they would do one and the same thing and live in one and the same house.

So off they set to find themselves a job.

On and on they went until they came to garden. Seeing them approaching, the gardener asked,

‘Where are you bound for, lads?’

Blower-wind answered for all of them,

‘We’re off to seek some work.’

‘Come and join me,’ said the gardener. ‘I’ve plenty of work: turning the rattle, scaring the moles and protecting the vegetables.’

‘That’s just the work for me,’ said the wind.

At that all three entered the garden and saw a pole sticking out of the ground: and on top of the pole was a windmill-rattle.

How the wind blew! The windmill turned round and round, the rattle rattled, the pole rocked, and the moles underground scampered away from the garden.

‘Thanks a lot,’ said the gardener. ‘Stay and work with me.’

Blower-wind answered,

‘All three of us have decided to do one and the same thing and live in one and the same house. So let my companions now have a go at blowing.’

The little Pecker-bird perched on the rattle and pecked at it but it did not move at all.

‘You aren’t much of a workman,’ said the gardener.

And Hoarder-ant piped up,

‘There’s no sense in trying: if my sister can’t manage it I certainly can’t.’

So that was that, the friends parted with the gardener and went on their way.

2

On and on they went until they came to an orchard. There they saw a gardener who called to them,

‘Where are you bound for, lads?’

‘We’re off to find some work,’ the bird answered for all of them.

‘Come and join me,’ said the gardener. ‘I’ve plenty of work: there are the pesky beetles and caterpillars to keep down and the fruit trees to save.’

‘That’s right up my street,’ said the little Pecker-bird.

So the three entered the garden and saw plenty of beetles and caterpillars sitting in the trees and gnawing holes in the leaves.

You should have seen Pecker-bird deal with them! He swooped on



one beetle after another, pecked up one caterpillar after another.

'Thanks a lot,' said the gardener. 'Stay here and work for me.'

Little Pecker-bird answered,

'All three of us have decided to do one and the same job and live in one and the same house. So let my companions try to deal with the pests.'

Blower-wind rushed at a beetle, but he knocked all the apples to the ground instead.

'You aren't much of a workman,' said the gardener.

And Hoarder-ant piped up,

'There's no sense in me trying: if my brother can't manage it, I won't be any good.'

There was nothing for it but for the friends to say goodbye to the gardener and go on their way.

On and on they went until they came to the edge of the woods. And there they saw an old lady coming towards them.

‘Where are you, lads, bound for?’ she asked.

Hoarder-ant answered for all of them,

‘We’re off in search of work.’

‘Then come to me,’ said the old lady. ‘Come and see what you can do for my sore legs.’

‘That’s just the work for me,’ said Hoarder-ant. ‘I’m a good doctor.’

Crawling on to the old lady’s leg, he squirted some ant acid under her skin.

‘Thanks a lot,’ said the old lady. ‘Why don’t you stay with me and heal the sick?’

But the ant replied,

‘All three of us have decided to do one and the same job and live in one and the same house. So let my companions have a go at healing people.’

But Blower-wind and little Pecker-bird said,

‘There’s no sense in us trying: we don’t have any medicines, we’ve nothing to heal people with.’

There was nothing for it but to say goodbye to the old lady and go on their way.

3

On and on they went until they came to a thick green forest.

‘Where are you bound for, lads?’ murmured the forest.

Blower-wind, little Pecker-bird and Hoarder-ant all answered in one voice,

‘We’re going in search of work.’

‘Remain here with me,’ said the forest. ‘I have plenty of work here picking up seeds, otherwise they will all grow up alongside the mother plants, giving no one any space.’

The wind glanced up and saw lots of winged seeds hanging from the trees under their broad leaves.



'That's the work for me,' said the wind. 'I can break wings off the trees, whirl them in the air and carry them off.'

The little bird peered into the dense forest and saw shrubs growing under the trees, with berries on them.

'That's the work for me,' said the little bird.

And she began to peck at the berries, so that their seeds fell upon the ground some way from the shrubs.

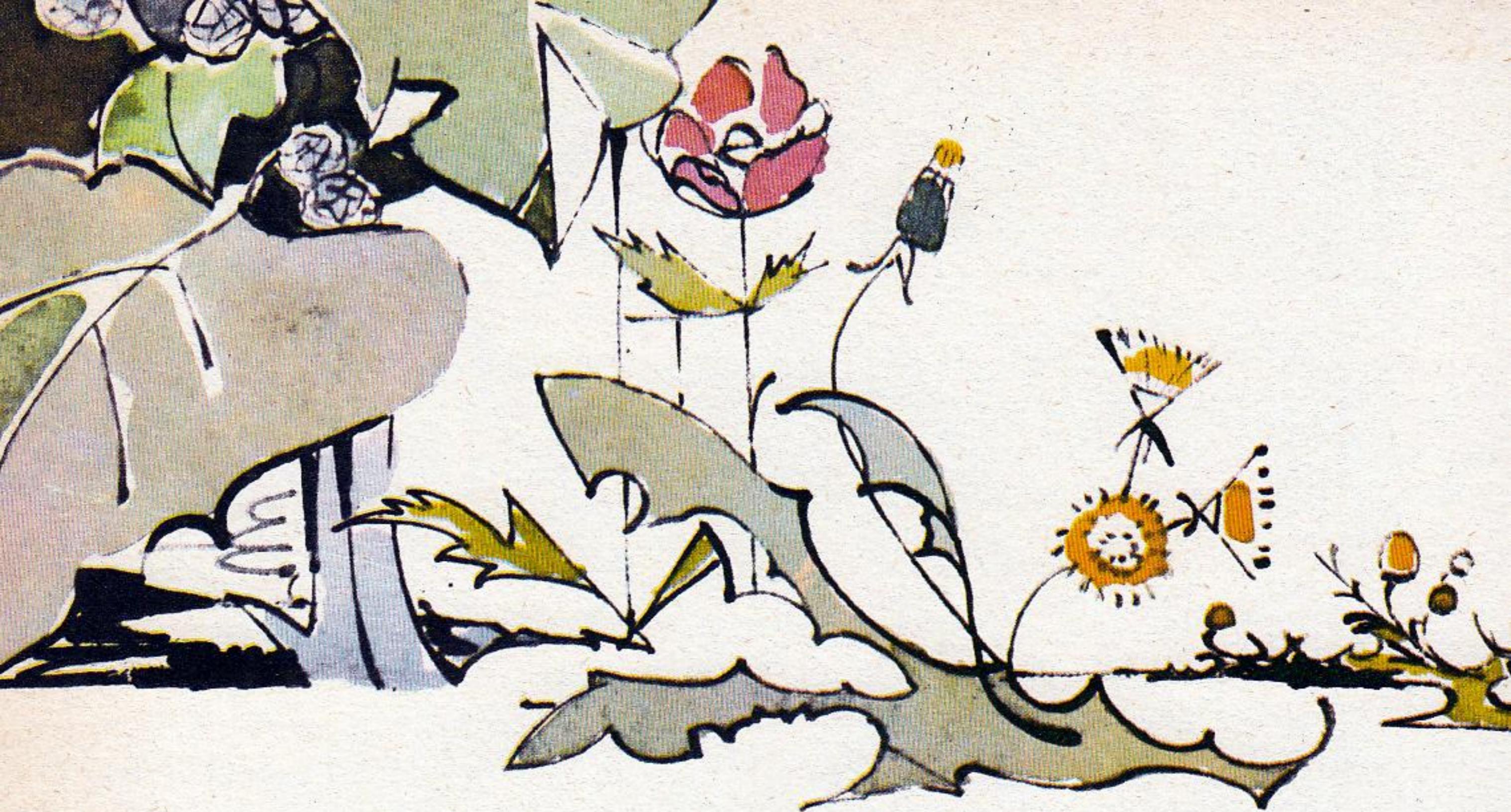
Meanwhile the ant looked at the grass and saw all sorts of seeds amidst the blades of grass, with white feelers already sprouting from them.

'That's just the work for me,' said the ant.

With that it crawled after the seeds amongst the grass. It bit off the white sprouts and ate them, scattering the seeds all over the ground.

And so the companions remained in the forest. They all do one and the same job of spreading the seeds. They all live in one and the same house: Blower-wind lives amidst the branches of the trees, on the second floor; little Pecker-bird lives in the shrubs, on the first floor; and Hoarder-ant lives upon the ground floor.





FENNEL WEED

A spring breeze was blowing, and all the grasses in the garden were so happy they could have a good chat. They were only able to chat when the breeze swayed them to and fro.

'Look, look,' rustled the grass, 'who's that growing over there, right on the path?'

And all the blades of grass swayed over as low as they could to get a better look.

And over there, in the middle of the path, a low, thick Fennel Weed was growing, with little leaves like tiny threads.

'Silly little fool,' hissed the blades of grass. 'What did you have to grow there for?'

'Because I like it here,' she said.

'But you won't like it. Oh no you, won't, when people tread on you, will you?'

Fennel Weed took offence at their taunts and stopped talking to them. She was still and fragrant. Still and fragrant. She was so very sweet-smelling.

Uncle Burdock felt sorry for her.

‘Don’t worry,’ he said. ‘If they do tread you down, you can grow again. My Granddad was always doing that. He lived by a booth where ginger beer was sold. You ought to have seen the number of feet that trod on him.’

‘Not everyone can grow again,’ said the Poppy.

It looked at Fennel Weed and shook its head.

It had become very warm outside and all the weeds had burst into bloom. Blooming as best they could. And they began to boast of their flowers.

‘My flowers are like the sunshine,’ said Uncle Dandelion. ‘Children smile when they look at them.’

‘Mine too are like the sunshine,’ said the Poppy. ‘The sun is only as red as my poppies of an evening. That’s because it’s cross at having to go to bed so early.’

But Uncle Burdock sighed. His flowers were like brushes that soap the face before a shave.

All the weeds showed off their flowers to one another. And then they all recalled the low-lying, thick little Fennel Weed.

‘Come on, show us your flowers,’ they murmured to her.

Her flowers all had little green spikes which she showed off to them.

‘Take a look at these,’ she cried.

‘Look, look, see what funny flowers she’s got. What peculiar little blossoms.’

Fennel Weed took offence at their taunts, and stopped talking to them. She was still and fragrant. Still and fragrant. Uncle Burdock and Uncle Dandelion tried to comfort her,

‘Don’t worry. At least no one will try to pick your flowers.’

‘And your head won’t be turned in the slightest when they blossom,’ said the Poppy.

Some holidaymakers were arriving at their country cottage: Mrs Holidaymaker, Mr Holidaymaker, Master Holidaymaker and a holidaymaking dog.

‘Oh just see how many feet are coming,’ whispered the blades of grass.



And the holidaymakers marched straight down the centre of the path where Fennel Weed was growing. The little dog stepped on her with its furry paw; so did Master Holidaymaker in his sandals, Mrs Holidaymaker in her high heels, and Mr Holidaymaker in his great boots.

And when they had passed by, Fennel Weed was lying flat on the ground.

'They've trampled her down, crushed her,' murmured the weeds. 'Farewell now, Fennel Weed.'

And suddenly there came a voice,

'No, not "Farewell"! It doesn't hurt a bit.'

And in a jiffy she had sprung up as if nothing had happened.

And her little leaves—the green threads—remained unharmed. Even the little flowers—tiny spiky burrs—popped up straight.

'Now there are leaves for you!' said Uncle Burdock.

'Now there are flowers for you!' said Uncle Dandelion.

'It's hard to believe,' said the Poppy.

All the weeds were very glad that Fennel Weed was safe and sound. And nobody teased her that day at all.

Uncle Dandelion's flowers turned into puffy little balls and, when the breeze began to blow, the weeds all murmured.





'Look, see Uncle Dandelion's children flying around.'

Some flew right across the grass and over the fence, even as far as the brook.

The breeze ruffled Poppy's head and out popped the tiny babies of the Poppy, sprinkling the earth all about.

'What a good thing the breeze is blowing,' murmured the weeds. 'We were so looking forward to it.'

Only Uncle Burdock had not looked forward to the breeze; he was looking forward to the puppy. And as it ran past, he stuck a sticky little basket to its tail, with his little children sitting inside it.

The puppy raced off past the gate and began to chase its tail; it fixed its teeth on the sticky basket and tore it off, so tipping Uncle Burdock's children all over the place.

Meanwhile Uncle Burdock looked on smiling. All through the day the seeds flew and sprinkled about. The weeds had been very busy. It was evening before they could rest in the cool of a summer drizzle. It was then they remembered they had not yet seen Fennel Weed's children.

She was glad they had forgotten her. For her children were very simple, though after the rain they seemed to become sticky. Sticky and tacky as if someone had dipped them into a droplet of honey. Fennel Weed was frightened no one would like them. And she was right.

'What funny children,' whispered the weeds. 'What peculiar babies!'

They stick so hard to their mother; you can't unstick them from yourself, can you? There's children for you! What on earth are you going to do with them?"

Down came the rain again. And when it had passed young boy ran out of the cottage, skipping down the path towards the gate. Fennel Weed was pressed to the ground under his sandal. Then he rushed down another path, through an orchard. After that he ran into the front garden, picking up worms as he went upon all the paths.

A breeze blew up scattering the last rain clouds. The weeds brightened up and began to gossip again. All of a sudden, they noticed that Fennel Weed was quite bare. It had gone bald like Uncle Dandelion. There was not a single seed left on it.

"Where on earth are your sticky little babies, where have they got to?" whispered the weeds.

But the bald Fennel Weed smiled and remained silent.



'Is it true the rain washed them away? Did it wash them under your roots? If it did, you'll all have a tight squeeze growing in the spring!'

'No,' replied Fennel Weed, 'it won't be a tight squeeze at all. Everything's just fine and dandy. And I'm mighty pleased that I grew up in the middle of the path.'

The weeds were very surprised and understood nothing.

But Uncle Burdock and Uncle Dandelion asked Fennel Weed the secret of her children's whereabouts.

And she told them.

Everyone learned her secret in spring, for little Fennel Weeds were growing along all the pathways, just by the gate, all along the path through the orchard, and down all the path-ways in the front garden, all over the place. Wherever that little boy had run last summer after the rain, the little Fennel Weeds were now growing.





THE UNWELCOME GUEST

An ant and a bee were drinking water from the same pool; at once they introduced themselves and became good friends. And so they should, for both worked hard their whole lives through and both were very fond of sweet things.

When it came to sweets the bee was much better off, for she could fly and find flowers containing sweet fragrant nectar. But the ant had to run along the ground, and flowers always blossomed high up, too high for it to reach them.

The bee felt sorry for the ant and told it,
'I'll treat you, little ant, I'll go and visit some white flowers, dead stinging nettles, and you run after me as fast as you can. I'll wait for

you to catch up and give you a shout; then climb up the stalk and eat your fill.'

Thus it was. The bee gaily flew off while the ant raced over the ground for all it was worth.

And it came to a frightening place: everywhere it looked it saw long sharp needles sticking out. They were thick needles, as thick as an ant's leg. And they were fixed to thick green trunks.

The ant halted. It really was an eerie place. And then, all of a sudden, the ant heard the bee's voice above.

'Shin up this stalk quickly,' the bee called. 'This is the dead nettle I was telling you about. It invites you to come and help yourself.'

'But how am I going to climb up,' replied the ant, 'with all these needles around? Even a tiny insect couldn't find a way through them, let alone me, an ant.'

'I'm sorry, little ant,' said the bee. 'I realised the nettle had such needles, I knew but didn't guess they would cause such problems. Don't despair. I'll just fly to the fireweed's red flowers, and you run after me as fast as you can, I'll wait for you and give you a shout. The fireweed has a smooth stalk, so you'll be able to race up it and eat your fill.'

And so it was. The bee flew blithely off and the ant raced after it as fast as its legs would carry it. Over stones and weeds it climbed, under parched bits of grass it crawled, through fine sand it slid downhill and around pools of water it ran.

Finally it came to a thick forest. All around stood green smooth trunks and up above were splendid flowers waving their heads beneath a blue canopy. The ant stood still admiring them when, suddenly, it heard the bee calling above it,

'Climb up this stalk as fast as you can. The fireweed invites you to come on up and sample its nectar.'

So up went the ant. Quickly it shinned up the smooth stalk and then, all at once, saw something in front blocking its path—a black clinging swamp with drowned midges floating on it. Their legs were tangled up, their little wings stuck to the black slime, their whiskers drooping.

What a fright the ant got; and how sorry it felt for the poor midges. What was it to do now? Was there no way through this terrible swamp? Wasn't there even a pathway?





The ant ran right round the stem. No, the swamp ringed the stalk completely.

Above the ant the bee was hurrying it up,
'Make it snappy, will you. This nectar is so lovely and sweet.'
'Perhaps I should have a go?' thought the ant. 'After all, I'm not a midge, I'm an ant.'

And it slipped its front legs into the swamp. In they went and stuck fast. It tried to pull them back but the swamp would not let them go. Oh dear, how scared the ant was. In a strange voice it called out, 'I'm stuck. Save me.'

'Hold on,' called back the bee. 'Take the strain and tug your legs as hard as you can. Don't despair, you'll get out.'

The ant took the strain. It strained might and mane and finally pulled its legs free of the swamp.

'Please forgive me, ant,' said the bee. 'I did realise there was a clinging marsh around the fireweed's stem. I realised that but didn't dream we'd have such trouble. Never worry. I'll just take a look at the toad flax's yellow flowers while you run behind me as best you can. I'll hold on for you and give you a shout. The toad flax has a smooth stalk with no pitfalls at all. You only have to climb up swiftly and eat your fill.'

So it was. The bee flew happily off and the ant came running for all it was worth.

And it finally arrived at a sunny hill. On the hillside stood greyish-green trunks with long greyish-green leaves upon them. Up above were yellow flowers to which the bee was flying. When it caught sight of the ant it cried,

'Come on up the stem as quickly as you can. The toad flax's flowers invite you to the feast.'

The ant swiftly ran up to the yellow flowers and sat down on a leaf next to the bee for a rest. Gazing at the toad flax flowers, it said in amazement,

'Now, there are flowers for you. They have yellow ears pointing upwards, a muzzle in front with a pouting orange lip, and a yellow tail hanging down. How will I dare approach such a monster?'

'I'll teach you,' said the bee.

Climbing onto the orange lip, it touched the centre of the flower with its head, and it opened up; then the bee crawled through the crack. The flower had swallowed the bee! Only the end of its trousers and back legs were poking out of the flower's jaws.

The poor ant was scared out of its wits, not knowing whether the monster would let the bee go. But the bee did manage to squeeze its way out again, though with some trouble.

'Now it's your turn to climb in,' said the bee.

The ant crawled onto the orange lip, knocked and knocked on the flower with its head, but without any effect: the flower did not bat an eyelid. The poor ant was close to tears. It was so hungry and so close to food, yet Oh so far!



‘I’m sorry, little ant,’ said the bee, ‘I did know that the toad flax’s flowers are always shut, I knew that but did not realise we would have so much trouble getting in.’

‘I’m not a bit angry with you,’ said the ant. ‘Only, to my mind, it’s not as easy as you say. Those needles were stuck there on purpose against me; that swamp was put purposely on the stem; and that muzzle-like flower was shut on purpose. The flowers aren’t keen on me having a tiny drop of their nectar.’

‘Yes, you’re probably right,’ said the bee.

‘Only why is it they don’t begrudge you any of their nectar?’ asked the ant.

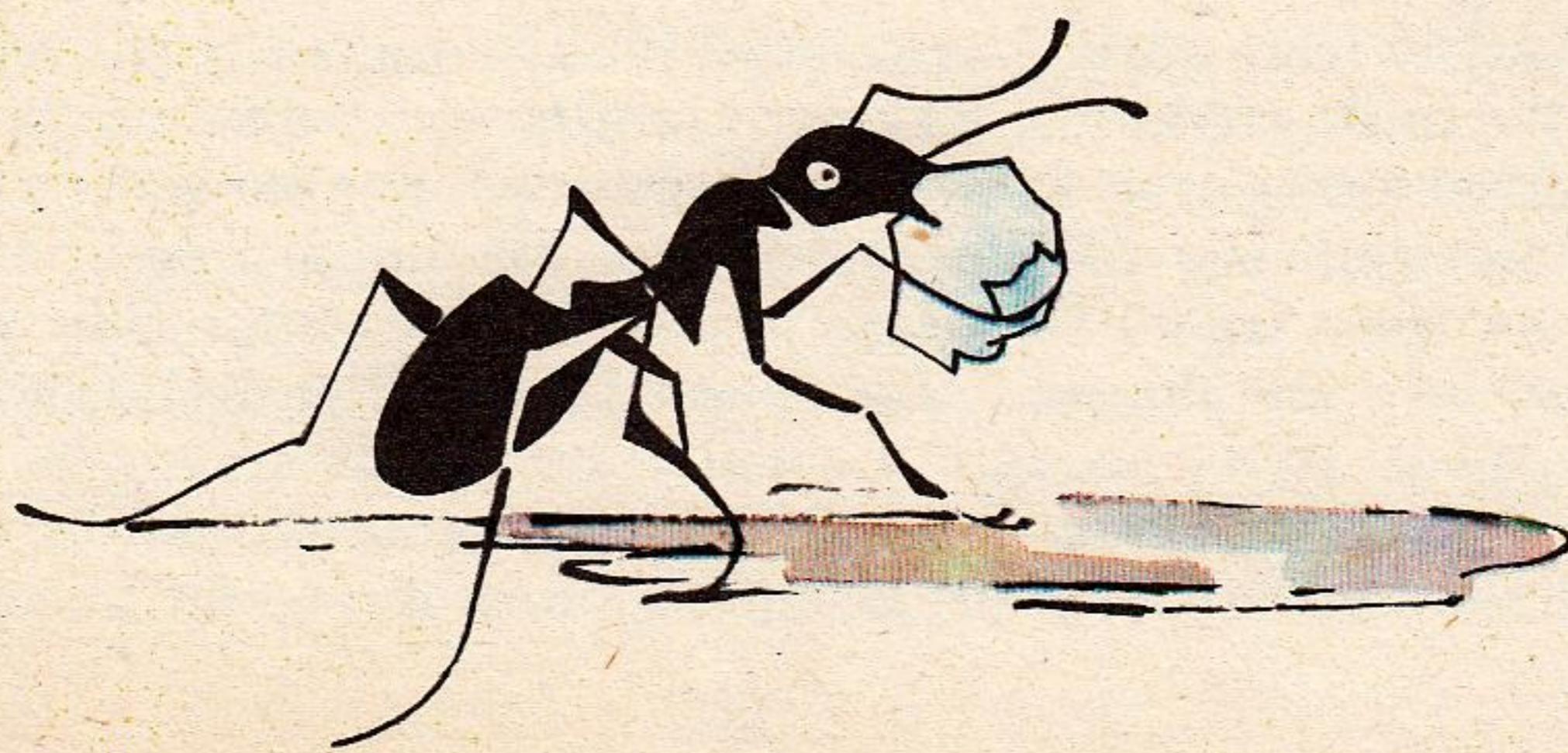
'Perhaps because I work for them,' said the bee. 'You see, I'm all covered in flower pollen. I carry it on my fur-coat from flower to flower. The flowers need that to give them seeds. That is why the flowers like me, invite me to visit them and feed me. But I never realised they would be so unfriendly to you.'

'Never mind,' said the ant. 'I don't fly, I don't wear a fur coat, I can't carry pollen, so it serves me right,' doesn't it? I'm better off running around the places I know best.'

At that the friends parted. The bee flew off to its hive, while the ant ran home to its ant-hill.

All turned out well for the little ant in the end, for just by his house he ran into one of his brothers carting home a huge piece of sugar. He confessed he had dragged it all the way from a cottage table.

The ant munched the sugar to its heart's content, and then gave its brother a hand dragging the rest of it to the ant-hill.





UNDER THE BUSH

The old bush was not fond of things growing under it, even the tiniest blade of grass.

And right from spring, as soon as buds began to fatten on its bare twigs, the bush would cast its gaze down. It would take a look to see if some cheeky bits of grass were growing underneath it.

And it was very cross when it saw the bright yellow flower of goosefoot grass under its lowest branch.

'What were you thinking of to choose this spot?' it would shout at the flower.

'But I never gave it a thought,' the flower would say.

And true enough, it really had not given it a thought. It was simply

happy to be alive. It rejoiced in the warmth and the sun, the sky and the happy midges who settled on its flowers. It was happy as it unfolded one little star flower after another.

Soon the bush's buds gave way to leaves and the bush, glancing down, shouted out,

'Just you wait and see what my shade will do, you silly goosefoot grass.'

But the goosefoot grass was not afraid and continued to enjoy all the fine things around it. The sunshine would light up first one, then another of its narrow leaves. Its first little flowers were already in bloom seeds growing in their little green boxes.

Leaves began to unfold on the bush. And a dark shadow fell over the ground below the bush. No longer was the sky visible. The yellow flowers of the goosefoot grass had already faded, while the seeds were beginning to ripen.

'How do you like my shade, goosefoot grass?' the bush cried. 'Are you having a good time of it?

'I'm a trifle tired,' said the goosefoot grass, 'and could do with a nap.'

'Nonsense,' said the bush. 'You're growing weak and soon will die. My shade has killed all the weeds that grew down there.'

The leaves on the bush straightened out and grew thicker. And with every passing day the shadow under the bush became blacker and blacker.

'Are you still alive, goosefoot grass?' called the bush.

But there was no reply.

'Dead at last,' said the bush. 'Fine thing too. There's no respite for any grass from my shade.'

And not a single green blade of grass grew under the old bush right up to autumn. When autumn arrived the leaves began to fall. The bush's branches became bare once more, and the enormous sky and sun could be seen again through them. Only there was no one to see and enjoy the sight.

Autumn and winter passed. And again spring arrived. The old bush had not yet woken up, yet underneath it a strong green shoot pierced the leafy ground carpet. It broke through and unfolded its leaves, pushing up a little stalk and opening up a yellow star flower.



'Goosefoot grass!' exclaimed the bush. 'So you didn't die, after all?'
'No, I didn't die,' said the little flower.

And so it was: it did not die. It had simply remained a little bulb all that time. And as a little bulb it had slept underground. It had slept throughout summer, autumn and winter so that it could become a happy flower once again in springtime.





THE CRAFTY DANDELION

The crafty dandelion grew up together with the other dandelions amidst the red clover and ears of corn at the path side. He made friends with the ears of corn and was always whispering something in their ears when they bent towards him. But the crafty dandelion was not so keen on gossiping with his fellow dandelions. All the same, the dandelion family lived happily enough until the time came to say goodbye to all their seed-babies.

The babies lived right on the heads of the dandelions, which was very convenient and splendid to see: all the children would be sitting calmly and tidily together on high, waving their fluffy heads.

Each seed-baby had its own ball of fluff like an unfurled umbrella, so as to stay in the air and fly in the wind.

So it was that the children grew up and had to find their own way in the world. It was then that the dandelion parents began to quarrel over which of them could launch their children first into the air, who could fly off fastest, so that there were no balls of fluff left on their heads.

Only the crafty dandelion had no dispute with anyone. He was too busy gossiping with the ears of corn, and keeping quiet with his brothers. But the other dandelions did not calm down until they spotted a lad running towards them. Thereupon they all stopped their niggling in a flash and implored the boy:

‘Blow on me.’

‘No, on me, on me.’

‘Me, me, me.’

Only the crafty dandelion kept his peace.

As soon as the lad set eyes on the fluffy big heads he muttered in angry tones,

‘I shan’t blow on you today, so there!’

Saying that he ran off without giving anyone a blow.

The dandelions shrank back. Then all of a sudden, they saw a dog running towards them along the path. At once they began to implore it,

‘Wag your tail, wag your tail, knock the fluff off me!’

‘Me, me.’

‘No, me, me, me.’

Only the crafty old dandelion kept quiet. The dog glanced at the balls of fluff and said in a cross voice,

‘I shan’t wag my tail, so there! My master came home today and I’ve been wagging my tail all morning, so it’s tired out now and drooping.’

So saying it ran off without bumping into a single ball of fluff. It was enough to make even a dandelion cry. Yet just then a breeze sprang up. It blew hard, rocking their tall stalks, knocking off their fluffy heads of seeds, snatching them up and bearing them away behind the knoll.

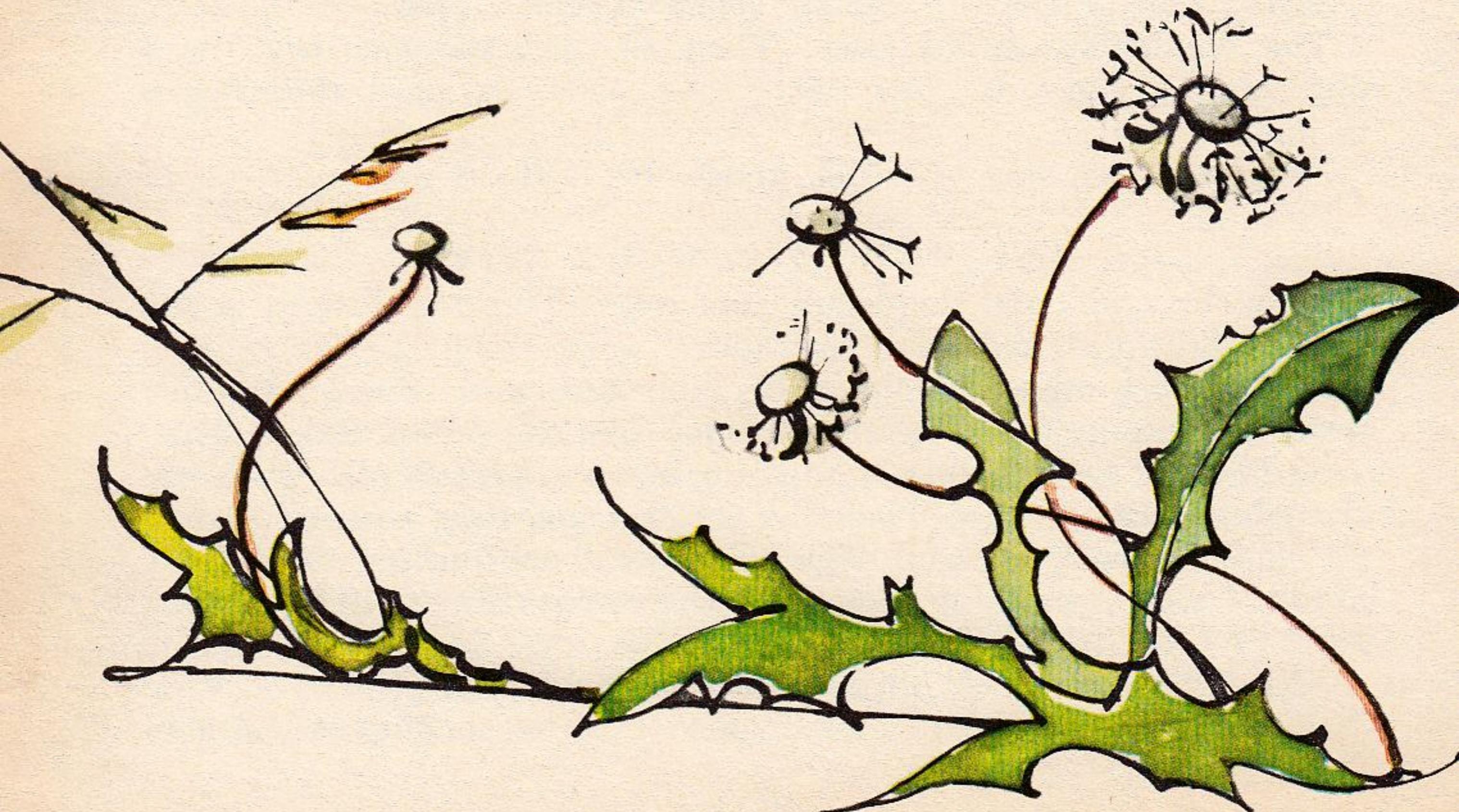
When the breeze had died down, the dandelions glanced around. Well, who had got rid of most children? All of them now had bald

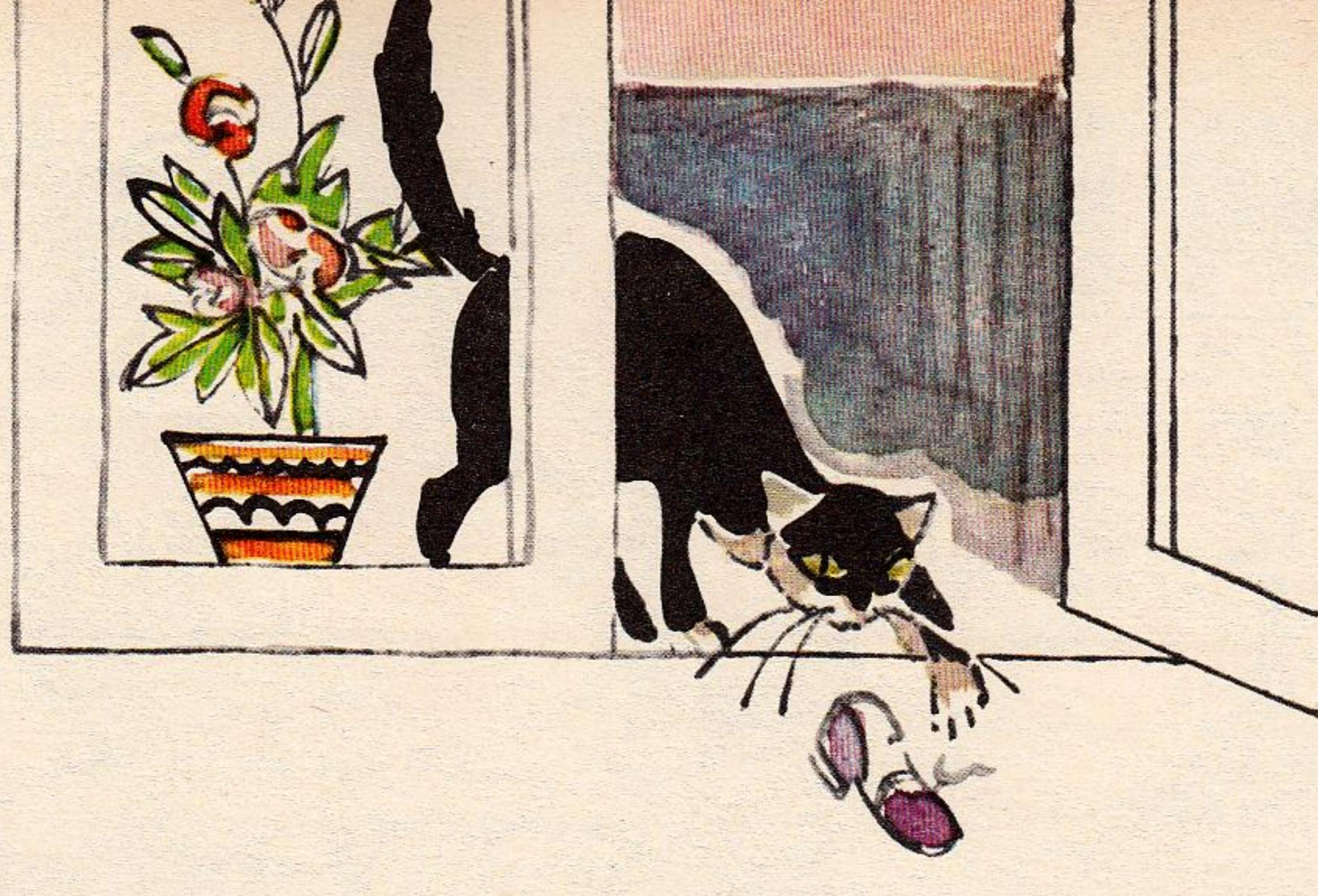
patches. Some lucky ones had lost half their fluff. But the one who was completely bald, right down to the last particle of fluff, was just one dandelion—the crafty dandelion who had made friends with the ears of corn. At that all of them turned to him, crying,

‘Tell us how you did it.’

But the crafty dandelion burst out laughing, telling them, ‘It’s now time for me to tell you all my secret. I had a pact with my friends the ears of corn, that the moment the wind blew each of them would give me a switch on my crown. So now you see?’

Yes, all of them could see all that remained on the stalks of the crafty dandelion was nothing more than a white button.





WHOSE BOOTS?

Our boots were standing on the windowsill when our pussy hopped up and began to sniff at them.

‘Puss, puss, puss. Don’t you sniff our boots,’ we cried.

Pussy took fright. She turned round to jump down but, in so doing, knocked the boots right out of the window.

So now the boots were lying in the garden, complaining,

‘Where are our feet? Who is going to put us on now?’

Just then a goose came up to the boots.

‘Ho, ho, ho,’ it said. ‘My feet will put you on.’

‘No thank you,’ they said. ‘Your feet are red with web rags between your toes. We shan’t go on you.’

‘Ho, ho, ho,’ said the goose. ‘Oh, yes you will.’

‘Scatter, scatter, goose,’ we shouted. ‘Get away from our boots. Scatter, scatter.’



At that the goose fled.
So the boots were lying in the yard, complaining,
'Where are our feet? Who is going to put us on?'
Just then a cock came up to the boots.
'Ko, ko, ko,' it said. 'My feet will put you on.'
'No, thank you,' they said. 'Your feet are like sticks, and you've got
sharp claws on your toes. No, we won't go on you.'
'Ko, ko, ko,' said the cock. 'Oh, yes you will.'
'Buzz off, buzz off, cock,' we shouted. 'Don't put our boots on. Buzz,
off, buzz off.'

At that the cock ran away.
So the boots were still lying in the yard, complaining.
'Where are our feet? Who is going to put us on?'
Just then a dog came up to the boots.
'Woof, woof, woof,' barked the dog. 'My feet will put you on.'
'No, thank you,' said the boots. 'Your feet are hairy, full of fur, we
can't even see your toes.'

'Doggie, doggie,' we shouted. 'Fetch the boots and bring them here.
Our little girl is here waiting for her boots.'

The dog did as he was told and picked up the boots in his teeth.
'Come on, come on, lad,' we called. 'Bring them here.'

So the dog brought our boots home. And where do you think those
boots are now? Whose feet are wearing them?





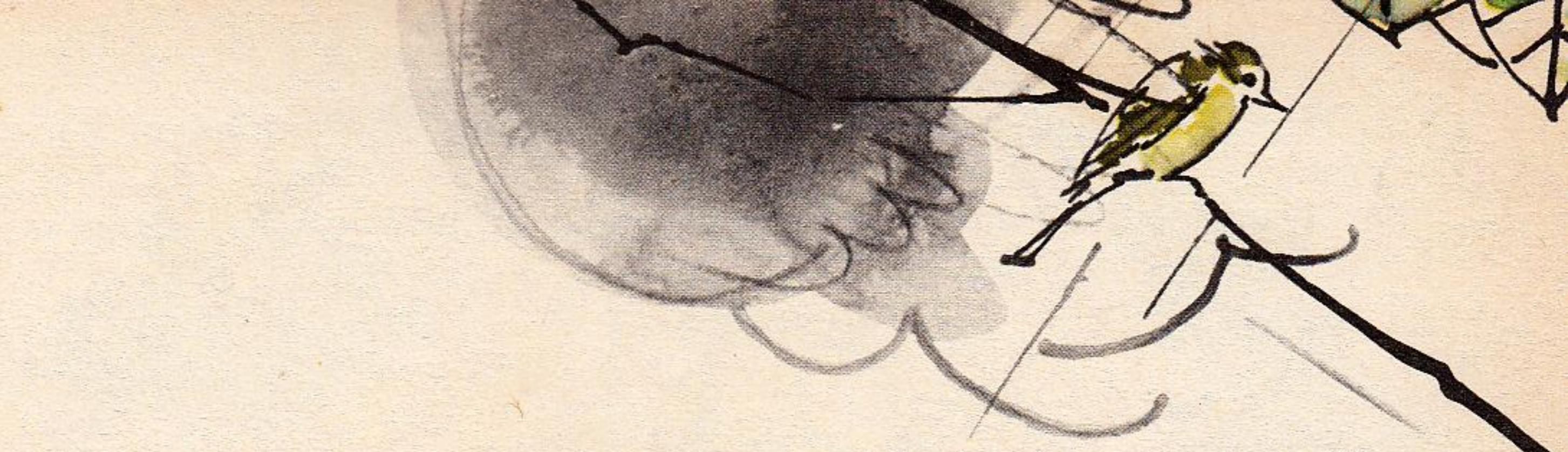
THE WILD STRAWBERRY

The sun was shining. A wild strawberry was ripening in the glade when, suddenly, a mosquito noticed her and piped up,
‘The berry is ripe: red and juicy.’

A bird heard the mosquito and came flying down to the glade. He wanted to eat the strawberry.

A little mouse heard the mosquito and came scampering to the glade. He too wanted to eat the strawberry.

A frog heard the mosquito, came hopping into the glade. He too wanted to eat the strawberry.



A snake heard the mosquito and came slithering into the glade. He too wanted to eat the strawberry.

A rain cloud rushed across the sun, blocking it out. When the mosquito saw it, he piped up,

'The rain's coming, wet and cold.'

When the bird heard the mosquito, he quickly flew up to a tree.

When the mouse heard the mosquito, he dived quickly into his hole.

When the frog heard the mosquito, he quickly hid under a leaf.



When the snake heard the mosquito, he quickly crawled under a root.

Meanwhile the strawberry bathed happily in the rain, pleased that no one had touched her.





THE TRUCK RIDE

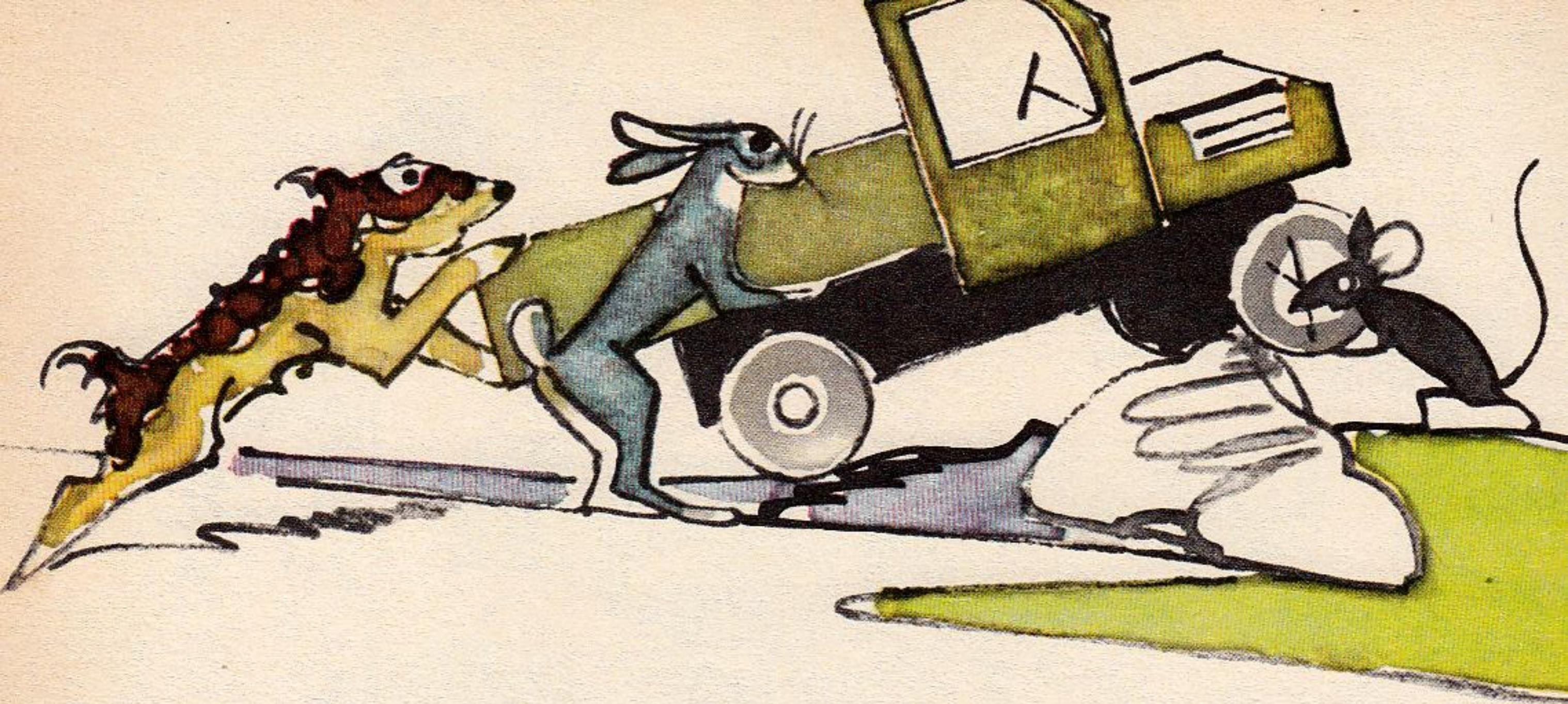
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Mouse, Hare and Dog took their places in the truck and off they went.

On and on they drove until they hit a rock.

Bang! The truck veered over and they all flew up in the air.

They sat on the ground and cried. But they had to go on somehow.



2

At that Mouse said,
'I'll lift the truck back on the road.'
It huffed and puffed, but could not lift it.
Hare said,
'Let me have a go. I'm stronger than you.'
So it tried too, but could not lift it.
Thereupon Dog said,
'Come on, lads, let's try together.'
So they all put their backs into it and, with a whoosh and a swish, up went the truck.

Climbing back onto the truck, they went to drive off with Mouse at the wheel, but it would not move: the rock had stuck under the rear wheels.

3

Up spoke Mouse, saying,
'I'll shove the rock aside.'
It began to heave and strain, but could not shift it.
Hare said,
'Let me have a go. I'm stronger than you.'

So it pushed and shoved, but could not shift it.

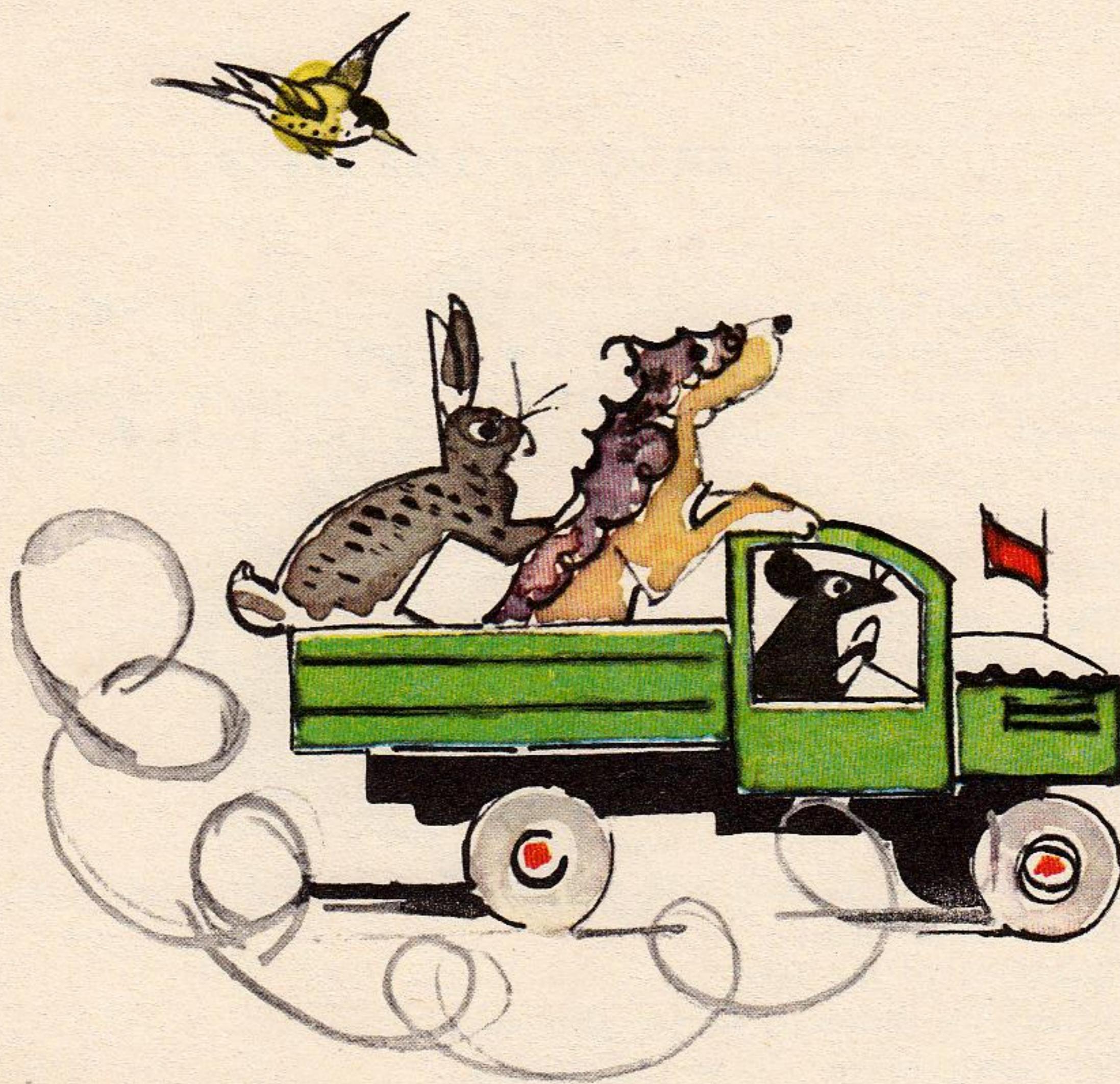
And Dog said,

'Come on, lads, let's do it together.'

So they all pushed and, with a whoosh and a swish, they moved aside the rock.

Climbing onto the truck, off they drove.

On and on and on they went without an accident. What a lovely truck ride!





THE FROG AT THE WELL

The toy frog wanted to build himself a well. Brick by brick, brick by brick, brick by brick. And there was his well.

Hopping onto the well, he peered down. Was there any water? Yes, there was. So off he went to fetch a pail. Then he sat in wait for a customer to drink his water.

First came a billy goat, saying,

‘Give me a drink of your water, Mr Frog.’

Frog let down his pail and brought up a pailful of water. He gave the billy goat a drink.

‘Thanks,’ said the goat.

And off he scampered home: top, top, top.

Next came a little bird, saying,

‘Let me have a drink of your water, Mr Frog.’

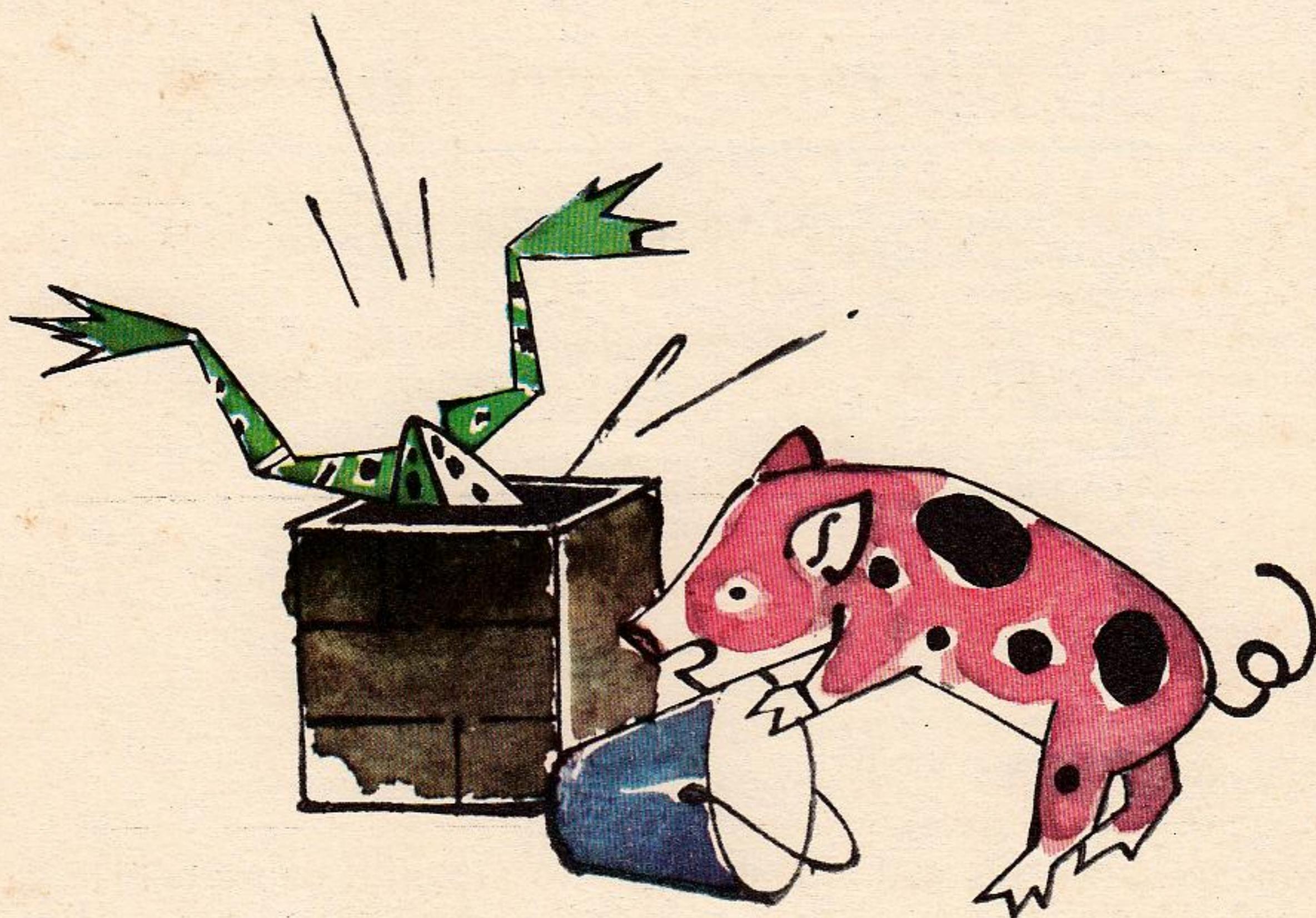
Frog let down his pail and brought up a pailful of water. He gave the little bird a drink.

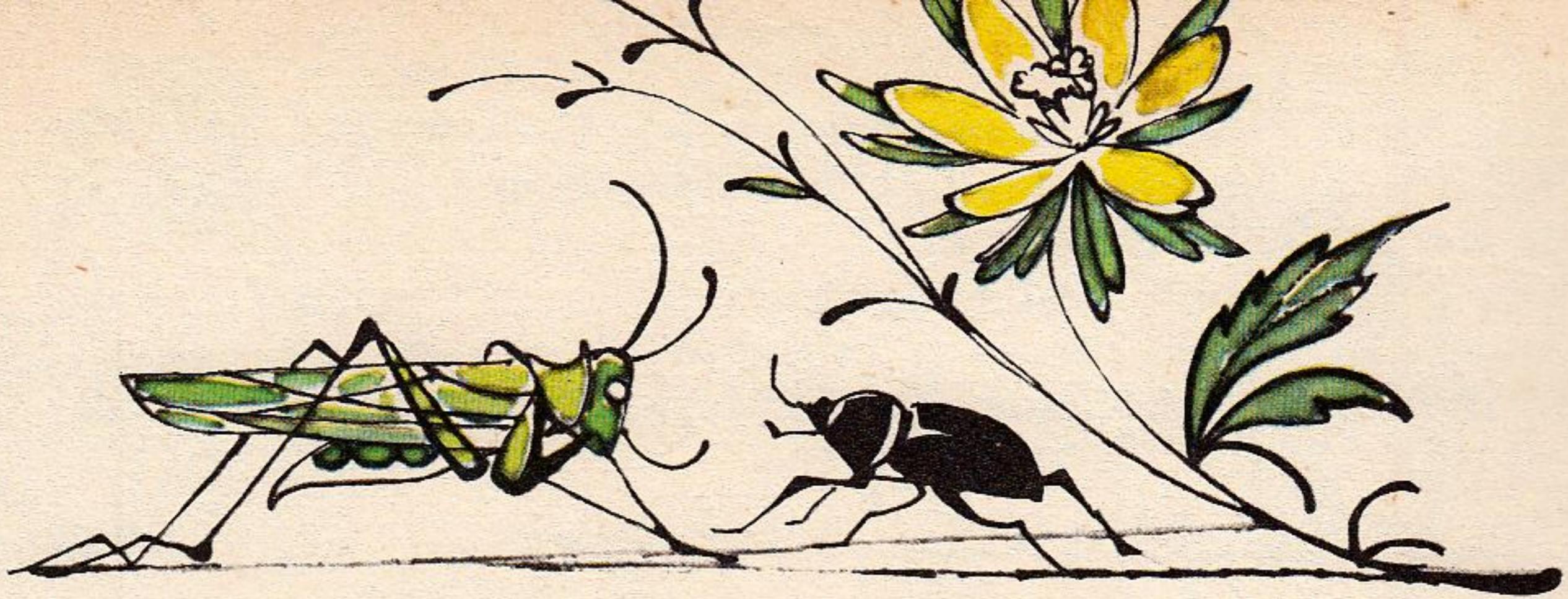
‘Thanks,’ said the bird.

And off he fluttered home: shoo-oo-oo.

Then along came a little pig, saying,

'Hey there, Froggie, give me some water. I'm thirsty.'
'No, I won't,' croaked Frog. 'I don't like being called Froggie.'
'If you don't, I'll eat you up.'
'Oh no, you won't,' said Frog.
And he dived into the safety of the well.
So the pig could not catch him and had to go home with nothing.





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